This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

3 3433 07481008 0

NBO
Dey

A Merry Christmas
to Nanna
from
Marian & Jean

Ne
Dey

THE TWO-FACED MAN

The Two-Faced Man

BY

VARICK VANARDY

AUTHOR OF "THE GIRL BY THE ROADSIDE,"
"ALIAS THE NIGHT WIND"

NEW YORK
THE MACAULAY COMPANY

COPYRIGHT BY FRANK A. MUNSEY CO.

COPYRIGHT, 1918,
BY THE MACAULAY COMPANY

Replacing missing copy. 353957

TO

MY VERY GOOD FRIEND TO WHOSE UNSTINTED

APPRECIATION OF

CREWE THE TWO-FACED MAN

I OWE MUCH OF MY OWN ENTHUSIASM

ROBERT H. DAVIS

OCT 22 1941

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
142596B
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R [illegible] L

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	The Thirteenth Passenger	9
II	Missing: $81,500	14
III	The Two White Envelopes	19
IV	The Dead Thief	32
V	The Hollow Sign	38
VI	Set a Thief to Catch a Thief	46
VII	Throwing a Scare into Crewe	56
VIII	A Show-Down	63
IX	Postmarked 5 P. M.	72
X	Shannon's Jess	76
XI	Birge Moreau's Sketches	81
XII	Three of a Kind	87
XIII	Shannon's Ghost	101
XIV	A Detective's Stratagem	110
XV	Faber's Finish	118
XVI	Driven to Desperation	123
XVII	Branton's Daughter	131
XVIII	The Beginning of a Crime	133
XIX	A Man Named Crewe	140
XX	The Need of a Hercules	147
XXI	Headquarters Advice	158
XXII	The Right Man	162
XXIII	On the Level	171
XXIV	Hermes Was a Thief	183
XXV	The Spiral Staircase	192

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXVI	The Coming of Spread-Eagle	198
XXVII	Spread-Eagle Has a Hunch	210
XXVIII	A Glaring Head-line	219
XXIX	Just in Time	228
XXX	Three Went in—Two Came out	237
XXXI	Some Contract!	246
XXXII	The Two Crewes	255
XXXIII	Exactly Two O'clock	261
XXXIV	Who Is the Woman?	268
XXXV	Putting One Over on the Bunch	275
XXXVI	The Temple of Vice	289
XXXVII	A Tragic Moment	302
XXXVIII	Crewe Went Outside; and Crewe Came in	309
XXXIX	The Sleeping Beauty	317
XL	The Inside of a Bank	328

THE TWO-FACED MAN

THE TWO-FACED MAN

CHAPTER I

THE THIRTEENTH PASSENGER

SHANNON entered at one door when Branton went out at the other.

It was the only day-coach beside the combination baggage and smoker attached to the 12:40 out of New York —and the 12:40 was the only "decent train" until late afternoon that made a stop at Monterey. Nor would that one stop to take passengers; only to leave them. Shannon had gone to that train on the chance that it might stop.

If he had guessed that the great Branton was on that train and would leave it at Monterey, he would not have boarded it; he would have waited. And for an instant after he discovered Branton leaving the coach, a wild notion to jump off again possessed him.

Shannon controlled the desire, knowing it to be unwise —and if there was a quality upon which he prided himself, it was that one of being "wise." So he went on into the car and dropped into one of the many unoccupied seats. There were twelve persons scattered among the remaining seats, for Shannon counted them with satisfaction. Shannon regarded thirteen as his lucky number, and he was the thirteenth passenger. He forgot that Branton had owned the distinction before he did.

There was a folded newspaper upon the seat beside Shannon when he sat down. It looked as if it had not been opened since its purchase, but he merely dropped his hand upon it. His mind was still intent upon Branton, and Branton's millions and power.

The train swept around a bend in the road and the early afternoon sun streamed in at the window upon Shannon. It was hot, and uncomfortable, and glaring, so he reached for the curtain, discovered that it was out of order, picked up the folded newspaper and moved back to the seat that was nearest the door. As he reseated himself the conductor entered.

Instinctively Shannon half raised himself and tucked the folded newspaper beneath him, then sat upon it. He had made the discovery, by the sense of feeling, that there was something else than newspaper between the folds of it. It was one of the traits of that peculiar "wisdom" of Shannon's that he concealed the article even before he knew that it contained anything worth concealing.

The conductor chided him gently for boarding a train which was not scheduled to receive passengers at Monterey, accepted his fare to the next station, and passed on. Shannon fingered the edge of the folded newspaper under him, but sat immovably upon it until the train began to slow up. Then he tucked the newspaper beneath his coat, and buttoned the coat over it.

Before the train actually came to a stop he dropped off. A solid Pullman had just arrived at the opposite side of the station. Shannon knew it to be the belated flyer, due at the station in New York at eight minutes past one, held up for orders. He dashed for the tunnel under the tracks. He came out at the opposite side in time. He caught the flyer just before it began to move.

That oddly wise instinct of his induced him to keep

the folded newspaper buttoned beneath his coat when he slipped into a chair in the buffet-car.

The conductor did not chide him this time because he had not been seen to board the solid Pullman train. Doubtless he had been mistaken for a passenger who had stepped off for a moment when the train stopped. He rode into New York unquestioned, and walked out at the great station with the others, unnoticed.

Shannon's quick eyes took in every detail of the station as he passed through it; noticed every face. He turned abruptly aside in order to pass behind a uniformed policeman instead of in front of him. He made a sharp turn to the left to avoid a "plain-clothes" man whom he saw first, and whom he knew by name, and perhaps too well.

Half an hour later, in a room where there was no fear of interruption of any sort, he undid the buttons of his coat and opened the folds of the newspaper. It contained a large, white linen envelope, which had not fallen from between the folds of the newspaper because it had been pinned fast to it. The envelope was not sealed. It was fastened by a string which led from one small red button to another one about which it had been wound. There was no inscription upon the envelope, printed or written. There was nothing to indicate who its owner might be.

Shannon lifted the flap of the envelope and drew out the contents. Then he uttered a gasp of surprise and stood very still indeed, staring at what he held in his hand; and he became suddenly and startlingly pale.

He breathed deeply, and through dilated nostrils. His active mind went backward with deliberate care, and in detail, over every incident that was associated with his possession of that white envelope. He held it in one hand and the former contents of it in the other, while

he thought it out. At last, with something like a shudder, partly apprehension, partly reassurance, he counted what he had found.

Five new, unused, never folded ten-thousand-dollar bills.

Thirty ditto, ditto, ditto, one-thousand-dollar bills.

Fifteen used and somewhat soiled one-hundred-dollar bills.

Fifty bills in all, aggregating the sum of eighty-one thousand five hundred dollars!

During all the time since his discovery, Shannon had made no sound. With the realization of what he possessed, he uttered words, but they came in a whisper, addressed to his other entity, for every man has two. Uttering them was the popping of the safety-valve of his pent-up emotions.

"Branton's money," he said. "I dropped into the seat he had occupied, just in time. That's a cinch. It's up to me now to keep it, and there is only one way to do that. Only just one way."

Slowly and with bated breath he returned the money to the envelope and put it in his breast-pocket. Then he tiptoed to a door, opened it part way, silently, and peered cautiously into an adjoining room that was smaller even than that one.

What he saw there startled him, and he stood like a statue for a moment, but soon he pushed the door farther open and passed inside.

There was an old, torn, and soiled mattress in one corner, and upon it was lying all that remained of what had once been a man, and that man was smaller in stature than he; was pale and thin and drawn, and had the waxen-hued skin of an opium smoker. And he who stood upright was tall and brawny and muscular, yet they were strangely alike, with that likeness which half-

brothers will sometimes bear to each other. One could never be mistaken for the other, yet there was the resemblance.

But the man on the mattress had smoked his last pill. He had taken his last portion of the "dope." He had died quietly and without knowing that the end had come, amid the squalor in which the other one who stood beside him had compelled him to live.

And that dead man on the floor was the Shannon whose picture was in the gallery and whose record was upon the books at headquarters. The live one, who stood beside him, posing under another name and occupying a position of authority, had used this poor devil as a scapegoat; had committed the deeds and was the thief whom the police had believed this dead man to be.

The big Shannon, who was alive, worked rapidly upon himself after that, and when, a little while afterward he left that house, he did not at all resemble the person who had entered it with the stolen money in his possession. He wore an expression of smug satisfaction, too, and once he muttered to himself:

"Maybe Holderness saw me when I came through the station, but if he did, he thought it was Shannon, sure—and now Shannon is dead. No more Shannon after this. Shannon is dead, and Shaughnessy lives."

Then he made his way directly to police headquarters.

CHAPTER II

MISSING: $81,500

THE automobile sent to the station to meet the great man was late.

G. Mortimer Branton, financier, capitalist, autocrat of the destinies of many, was an irritable, nervous, sometimes irascible person, always impatient. He strode up and down the platform squeezing tightly the bundle of newspapers he carried under one arm, scowling at the roadway which was really attractive to the eye, until the automobile appeared.

Then he climbed into it without a word in reply to the chauffeur who attempted to explain that he had been compelled to stop on the way down to adjust a new inner tube. He did not remove the newspapers from beneath his arm during the short ride. The heat of the day, which was considerable, seemed not to trouble him.

Mr. Birge Moreau, a man of notoriety, and famous as a painter of portraits, met him at the door. The car went on around the house toward the garage.

"How are you, Birge?" Branton greeted. "Can I go straight to my room? I suppose you've arranged one for me. My secretary will be out on the next train." Curtness, preoccupation, the weight of great affairs, were never absent from G. Mortimer Branton's manner.

"Go ahead," Moreau replied, laughing and waving his hand. "Wash off a little of that brusqueness with the dust. You'll find me in the green room when you come down. It's cooler there."

Within one of the rooms allotted to the financier's uses Branton found everything needful for his comfort. He threw the bundle of newspapers upon a couch, stripped off his coat and dropped it upon them. A man appeared at the door and offered his services. Branton sent him away. He completed his toilet, dusted his own coat, laid it aside again, and picked up the papers. They were held together by a rubber band which he stripped off as if he were angry. But his demeanor was always an angry one.

He thrust the papers aside until he came to a *Herald* in the middle of the package, which he opened. Inside, and pinned fast to it, was a white linen envelope, the flap fastened down by a string and two small red buttons. He removed the pin, laid the envelope at one side while he put on his coat, put the envelope into a pocket of it, and descended the stairs to the green room where his host was awaiting him. He crossed to the table and lighted a long, black cigar before he uttered a word. Then he took the envelope from his pocket and tossed it across the table toward Moreau.

"There you are," he said. "It is what you will need to carry out this business for me. Secrecy is the main thing, until it is concluded."

Moreau picked up the envelope and slowly unwound the string. Branton smoked on, wreathed in a cloud of fragrance, watching him. Moreau drew out the contents of the envelope. Branton started to his feet with an oath, always prolific in profanity. Moreau looked up with a smile.

"Queer sort of cash, that," he said. "It's a bond, isn't it?"

Branton reached across the table and snatched bond and envelope from the grasp of Moreau. His eyes bored into both, examining them minutely. He threw them

down again, jumped from his chair, seized the telephone, and consigned everything connected with the present circumstance to perdition, while he awaited the connection with his own office in the city.

After ten minutes of rapid-fire talk over the telephone to which Moreau appeared to pay scant attention, Branton hung up the receiver, thrust his hands deep down into his pockets, chewed savagely upon the end of his cigar for a moment, then announced:

"I have lost that money, or I have been robbed. Which?"

"Both, I should say. But it won't break you. I have known you to give as much as that for a book. All the same, this deal requires cash. If you intend to carry it through, send for more."

"I have. It'll be here in time. But what became of that money?"

"The man who substituted that bond for it could tell you, I've no doubt."

"There hasn't been any substitution, that's the odd thing about it. That bond is mine, and was on my desk in that envelope. The money was there, too, in another envelope."

"Then you picked up the wrong envelope and left the money on your desk."

"No, I didn't. The money isn't there now. They searched for it while I was at the phone. Besides, I pinned the money inside of the newspaper myself."

"You did what?"

"That is a hobby of mine for carrying cash with me in large sums. I have proved it to be the safest way. I was once in a train hold-up out West. I had a hundred and fifty thousand with me. The robbers never thought of looking into the newspapers on the seat beside me. They swept them off the seat, that was all."

"Are you satisfied that the money you say you had with you to-day is lost?"

"Part of it. Perhaps all of it. Fifty thousand of it won't do the thief much good, and it may fetch him a cropper. Didn't you hear me tell Bingham to notify the banks about those bills for ten thousand?"

"What about them?"

"Banks keep records of ten-thousand-dollar bills. It wouldn't be safe to attempt to change one of them now."

"What else are you going to do in the matter?"

"Just this, Birge: I'll ask you to fire that fellow you sent up to my room. I sent him away, but he was sulky about it. I was in the bath-room twenty minutes or so. The newspapers and the money were on the couch in the lounging-room, under my coat. I think he got it."

"Nonsense."

"I do. Send him away, anyhow, and see what comes of it. He won't know that ten-thousand-dollar bills are traceable, and he'll try to get one of them changed. There is no use searching him. He has them safely stowed away by this time."

"It's absurd, Branton. Do you really believe that you brought both of those envelopes here with you?"

"I know I did. That's the only explanation. Bingham, knowing my habits, pinned the envelope that he thought contained the money, inside of one of the papers. He said so over the wire. That was this one. I pinned in the envelope that contained the cash, myself. I know that. I put it in the middle of the bundle, not knowing what Bingham had done."

"In all probability the other envelope is still among those papers in your room. Let's go and find out. I'd as soon think Bingham had stolen it as Feltner."

"It isn't there," Branton replied coolly, but rising.

"I didn't look, of course, but I'm satisfied about it. But we'll go and see for ourselves."

"At all events," Moreau remarked as they ascended the stairs together, "if both envelopes were there, *we will find two newspapers with pinholes in them.*"

CHAPTER III

THE TWO WHITE ENVELOPES

One of the orders that Branton gave to Bingham, his secretary, in that short talk over the wire, was for him to go personally to police headquarters to request the inspector in charge of the detective bureau to send out an especially equipped and clever operative. "Tell him all you know about it, and all that I have told you of my part of it," he had concluded. The consequence was that the detective and Bingham arrived at Monterey on the same train, shortly before six o'clock.

During the ride from the station to the house, the operative, already as thoroughly informed by Bingham as was possible, questioned the chauffeur. Bingham, the secretary, listened. Having assured himself that the chauffeur was the same man who had been sent to the station after Branton, the operative inquired concerning the bundle of newspapers.

"I saw the newspapers, certainly," the chauffeur told him. "Mr. Branton had no other baggage with him. There were five or six of them, I guess, with a rubber band around them. It was a *Herald* on top. I don't know what was under it. He held them under his arm all the time, and carried them into the house with him. I should think it would be easy enough to get more papers if he happened to lose one that he wanted."

"I'm Shaughnessy, from headquarters," the operative announced when he was admitted to the green room, which was Moreau's favorite lounging room in his per-

fectly appointed house. He was a clean-cut, well-built, good-looking chap, smooth-shaven, and with a complexion like a girl's. He wasted no time in unnecessary preliminaries.

"Bingham has told me what he knows. What about the newspapers, Mr. Branton? Was one of them missing?"

"No. Sit down. There they are. I brought them down-stairs for you to see. Two *Heralds*, a *Times*, a *Sun*, and a *Tribune*."

"Why two *Heralds?*"

"An accident. I wanted a paper to read on the train. All of the morning papers are in my office. As I was about to leave it for the station I picked up a *Herald* and shoved it under the rubber band, on top of the other papers that made up the package."

"I am to understand, then, that you had already pinned the envelope containing the money inside of another *Herald?*"

"Yes."

"Where did you place that paper, relative to the others in the packet?"

"Before I picked up the extra one it was the second paper down from the top. When I shoved the extra paper under the rubber band it was in the middle, of course."

"Who put the papers together and snapped the rubber band around them in your office?"

"I did, arranging them as I have described."

"Bingham thinks that he pinned the envelope that contained the money inside of a *Herald* also. He says he laid it on the table beside the other papers, for you to arrange. This envelope here, that contained the bond, was in a *Herald*, wasn't it?"

"Yes. In the middle of the packet where I had put

the one that contained the money. Now, you just hold your horses for a minute, Shaughnessy, and I'll make you understand this thing. You know how I arranged the papers before I left my office. Well, that extra *Herald* that I brought along, to read on the train, must have contained the envelope that Bingham thought held the money, and pinned into it. Forty-five new bills don't take up much space. A hundred of them laid down in a pile makes a package only five-sixteenths of an inch thick. So I must have picked up the paper that Bingham had used, and not have noticed the presence of the envelope inside of it—and so I put that one on top of the packet."

"But you would have discovered it when you read the paper on the train."

"I didn't read it. That's the point. I did pull it out from under the band, intending to open it and read it, but I laid it upon the seat beside me instead. I fell to thinking of other things. I was so absorbed that I didn't realize that we were at Monterey until the train pulled up. I grabbed the paper and shoved it back into its place under the band, and hurried out.

"I held the packet under my arm while I stood on the station platform, waiting for the car that was to meet me there. I didn't take it from under my arm until I threw it upon the couch in my room up-stairs, and dropped my coat over it. After that I was in the bathroom with the door closed, fifteen or twenty minutes. When I came out I put on my coat, ripped the rubber band from the packet of newspapers, opened the one that was in the middle, took the envelope that I found pinned inside of it, and came down here where Moreau was waiting.

"When the envelope that I brought with me to this room was opened, it contained the bond. Moreau went

up-stairs with me to examine the other *Herald*. There was no envelope in that one, but—there it is; look at it—you will find pinholes through it showing where an envelope has been fastened to it. Hold on a moment till I get through.

"What happened? This: while I was in the bath-room somebody entered the outer room and stole the envelope that contained the money. He found the bond, first, and looked deeper. Then he found the cash."

"You mean, of course, that he discovered both envelopes," the operative interjected; "this one, containing the bond, first, then the other, with the cash? That he helped himself to the envelope containing the money, and restored the packet of newspapers to its original shape, with the *Herald* containing the envelope with the bond, in the middle of the pile?"

"Precisely."

"That would suggest previous knowledge. Also that the thief knew of your unusual method of carrying large sums in cash pinned inside of newspapers."

"Who so likely to have acquired such knowledge as Moreau's valet?" Branton retorted. "Only three persons knew that I was to bring that cash with me—Bingham, Moreau, and myself. Only two persons knew that I was to come out by the 12:40: Bingham and myself. Not until after that train had left the station in New York did Bingham notify Moreau of my departure, and ask him to send to the station to meet me." Branton turned sharply toward his secretary. "Who answered your telephone call?" he demanded.

"The valet, Feltner. I gave him your message for Mr. Moreau," Bingham replied.

Moreau had flushed hotly during Branton's latest announcements. The flush was succeeded by an ex-

pression of amused contempt accompanied by a half-smile.

"Feltner knew nothing of your coming, Branton, until Bingham telephoned. He brought the message to me, and I sent him to the garage with the necessary order. He knew nothing of any cash, or that you intended bringing any with you. I have made no mention to him, or to any other person, of the business in hand," he said. "It would be as logical to charge me with the theft as Feltner."

"Quite so," Branton retorted coldly.

Birge Moreau pressed the electric button that hung suspended from the chandelier above the table. The footman who responded summoned the valet.

"Feltner, you are charged with theft," Moreau said, without preface. "When Mr. Branton arrived I sent you to his rooms to offer your services. He sent you away. Did you, nevertheless, enter that room while—we will say—he was in the bath-room?"

"I did, sir," Feltner replied, apparently unmoved by the abrupt charge made against him.

"What did you do there?"

"I carried Mr. Branton's coat to the window and brushed it. It was thick with dust. I replaced it as I had found it, upon some newspapers that Mr. Branton brought with him. I also dusted his hat. Then I came away."

"Why did you do all that after being told that you were not wanted?"

"Because you told me to, sir."

"For the enlightenment of all, tell us exactly what directions I gave you."

"You said, sir: 'Attend upon Mr. Branton. He will probably send you away, but don't mind that. It is his manner. He needs brushing.' So I did as I have said.

But I hadn't a desire to thrust myself personally upon the gentleman, sir."

"Did you notice the newspapers that were under the coat, particularly?"

"Only that there were several of them held together by a rubber band. I am under the impression that the top one was a *Herald*. I did not examine them."

"Did any other person enter that room while you were there, Feltner?"

"Yes, sir. *You* did."

"Thank you. That will suffice for the present. You need not concern yourself about my first remark to you.

"Mr. Shaughnessy," he added quietly to the operative when the valet had gone, "when Mr. Branton arrived here I was already aware of two things concerning him; these: that he was to bring with him $81,500 in cash, and that it was his habit to carry large sums like that pinned inside of a newspaper. I noticed the bundle of papers under his arm, and I assumed that the money was concealed among them. I sent Feltner to wait upon him. Then, I followed up the stairs and went to my own room. Feltner was dusting Branton's coat when I came out of my room two or three minutes later. I don't think he saw me then. I saw him replace the coat upon the bundle of newspapers. I entered the room while he was dusting the hat. Feltner went out of the room. I remained. So, if anybody in this house stole the envelope containing the money, I am the only one who could have done it. . . . One moment, if you please; I haven't finished. . . .

"Mr. Branton has charged my servant with the theft. Feltner and I are the only persons who had opportunity to steal it. I am positive that Feltner did not take it, and I know that I did not. Branton says that he re-

moved the top paper from the bundle while he was on the train, but that he did not read it. He put it down upon the seat beside him, became absorbed by his thoughts, and picked it up again and returned it to the bundle, hastily, only when the train rushed in at Monterey station. He assumes—he has not said so, but it is plainly his assumption—that the envelope containing the *bond* was pinned inside of that paper which he intended to read on the train coming out; that the thief discovered it first, and found it to be worthless; that the thief then discovered the other envelope inside the *Herald* in the middle of the bundle, removed it, paper and all, replaced it with the *Herald* at the top of the bundle, removed the envelope with the money, and put the *Herald* from which he had taken it at the top. . . . It is all very simple, of course. But there is a palpable error in Mr. Branton's cocksuredness. There probably wasn't any envelope inside of that top *Herald* when he pulled it from the bundle and laid it on the seat beside him.

"He says that he himself put the *Herald* that held the money, in the middle of the bundle. He says that his secretary told him over the telephone that *he* pinned the envelope that contained the money inside of a *Herald*, and laid it upon the table in the office. Probably Bingham did do that. But he did more than that. He watched his opportunity, and, when Branton's back was turned, substituted the *Herald* with the bond-envelope for the *Herald* with the cash-envelope, in the middle of the bundle, and slipped the cash-envelope into his pocket. That, it strikes me, is the only way to account for the pin-holes in the newspaper at the top of the package. Now, I don't really believe that Bingham stole that money, but I return the compliment which Mr. Branton has paid to me in the matter of my servant,

by showing that his secretary *might* have taken it. Plainly the money was taken before it left Mr. Branton's office, and there are only two men who could have taken it while there: Branton, himself, or his secretary."

Moreau turned calmly to Branton as he concluded his rather long speech, and, with a deprecatory shrug of his shoulders and a half-smile upon his cameolike features, but with none in his eyes, added:

"So I say to you, Branton, practically the same thing that you said to me before the arrival of Mr. Shaughnessy. Fire the fellow, and let's see what comes of it. I point the finger of guilty knowledge at Bingham."

Bingham, white with sudden rage, started to his feet.

G. Mortimer Branton's apparent anger was never deeper than the surface. It existed in his demeanor, and was used only as a buffer. It was never real. Policy would have forbidden him to be angry even if his natural inclinations had not been the antithesis of ill-temper. He could be oddly moved to laughter, at times, and he was so then. But he ventured no further opinion.

After he had laughed, he turned to Shaughnessy.

"It's up to you now, Mr. Detective," he said with characteristic bluntness. "I have always said that you fellows weren't worth your salt. Here is an opportunity for you to prove that you are. Moreau has turned the tables upon me nicely. What have you got to offer about it?"

"It seems plain enough to me that you left the money in the seat you occupied in the train that brought you out here, Mr. Branton," the operative replied with the cool assurance of one who is convinced of the correctness of the statement made.

"That is utter and abject nonsense, of course."

"Let us see if it is. Have you telegraphed to the

conductor of that train, or to anybody, concerning your loss?"

"No. Of course I didn't leave the cash in the car-seat, but even if I had done so, what would be the use of telegraphing now? Pooh! If the cash-envelope had been in that paper I pulled out of the bundle, and didn't read, it would have remained in that paper when I returned it to the bundle. If it had dropped out of it, I would have seen it, or heard it."

"The Occidental Express, due in New York at one-eight, was late to-day," Shaughnessy remarked reminiscently. "I was at the station when it got in. I know the features of a good many crooks, and I saw one that I did know leave that train. I also know that the same man was in the city last night, so he couldn't have come very far on that particular train. All of this is suggested by the thought that Shannon—that's the crook's name—might have gone out on the twelve-forty with you, might have secured the envelope, and might have caught the Occidental back to New York, at the next station beyond here, where it was, no doubt, held up for orders. Such a thing is barely possible, you know."

"I know it to be wholly absurd." The angry mannerism had returned to Mr. Branton. "What you say is simply damfoolishness. There were twelve passengers in that coach besides me. Every one of them was in front of me. There wasn't a soul behind me in that car. I sat with the bundle of newspapers on my lap, all the way out to Monterey. I don't think that both of my hands were off of it at the same time all the way out. If Shannon, as you call him, and a dozen others like him, had been in that car, they couldn't have got hold of the cash. I didn't leave the seat until the train got to Monterey. If I knew positively that Shannon was in that car,

I'd swear that he didn't get the money, because he couldn't."

"Wait a moment," said Moreau. "Which end of that car did you enter, at the station in New York?"

"The rear. I got aboard just as the conductor gave the signal to start. I told him who I was, and directed him to stop at Monterey to let me off. The train was moving when I sat down."

"Which end of the seat did you occupy? Nearer the aisle, or the window?"

"Both. I sat near the window, at first, but the sun came into it a trifle, so I shifted to get out of it. But what's the use of all this? What difference does it make which end of the car-seat I occupied?"

"You're a large man, Branton. You approached that seat from the rear of the car. No doubt you stopped at the seat with your hand on the back of the one in front of it, and edged into your own place sideways," Moreau said, musingly. "If there had been a newspaper lying upon that seat when you approached it, you would not have seen it."

"What in the name of goodness are you driving at now, Birge?"

"Why, this: If Shaughnessy's theory is correct, you probably sat down upon another *Herald* that somebody else had dropped there. While the train was passing through the tunnel, didn't you pull your own paper from under the rubber band so that you'd have it ready to read as soon as you were in the daylight again? Wasn't that the time when you laid your own paper down upon the seat beside you?"

"Maybe it was. I guess so."

"You shifted to the opposite end of the seat after the train had passed from the tunnel. Your mind was occupied—but I have never known it to be so occupied

that you do not instinctively remember the crease in your trousers. In other words, to move from one end of the seat to the other, you first stood up, then moved along and sat down again. You sat down upon the paper you had laid upon the car-seat, and you left exposed the paper that was already there. Fate decreed that the extra paper should also be a *Herald*. When you got up hastily to leave the car at Monterey, you picked up the extra paper, and left your own in the car-seat, where you had been sitting upon it."

Branton, always amenable to logic, scowled, and was thoughtful.

"That's all right," he remarked presently; "all but the pin-holes. How are you going to explain the pin-holes in that extra paper that you have created?"

By way of reply Moreau picked up the two copies of the *Herald* which Branton had brought with him. He examined them a moment. Then he put one of them down on his knee and held the other one in his hand.

"This is the paper that you brought down-stairs with you, Branton," he said. "It is the one that contained the envelope with the bond. The pin-holes are at the bottom of the first page of the news-section, at the third column, indicating that the paper was simply lifted open as it was originally folded, when the envelope was pinned to it. Is that the position in which you believe you pinned the envelope that contained the money?"

"It's the position in which I always pin such envelopes."

"Bingham, where did you pin your envelope?" Moreau put down that paper and picked up the other one.

"In precisely the same place. I have seen Mr. Branton do it often enough to know his habit about it."

Bingham was sulky, and his reply was not gracious. It was none the less to the point.

"I'd like you to be certain about that, Bingham," Moreau insisted.

"I am as positive about it as I am that you charged me a moment ago with having stolen that money," was the half-savage retort. Moreau smiled, and tossed the paper toward him.

"There lies your exoneration," he said. "The pin-holes in that paper are at the top of the first page of the news-section. And, Branton, I notice something now that escaped our attention before. The pin-holes are smaller. You and your secretary used bankers-pins, which are larger and longer than the pins in ordinary use. The pin-holes in that paper are small, and are much closer together than if you or Bingham had made them for the purpose defined. That newspaper now in Bingham's hand was carried aboard of that train by a person who had received it this morning from a news-dealer who had attached his bill to it. Branton, it was Bingham who placed the cash-envelope into the news-paper, at your office. It was you who pinned in the bond-envelope, not knowing what your secretary had done. You put the bond into the middle of the packet of news-papers. You put the money at the top of that packet. You pulled it out and laid it on the seat beside you while you were sitting upon *this* paper. Then you shifted over and sat on your own. When you left the train you picked up this paper, and left your own in the seat."

Shaughnessy, who had been an attentive listener, bent forward in his chair and seized the telephone.

"Police headquarters, New York. Quick action, please," he said.

Then, a moment later, while the others listened

tensely: "Hello, Cleary. This is Shaughnessy. I want Shannon, the 'shadow,' and I want him quick. Holderness made a report on him yesterday, and will know where to find him. Send *him*. Quick action, Cleary. It's eighty thousand this time, if Holdy gets there. I'll be in on the next train. Eighty thousand, cash. Lifted from G. Mortimer Branton." He replaced the receiver and started to his feet, addressing Moreau. "How soon can I get a train into the city?"

"Now, if you sprint for the garage. You have about twelve minutes to get to the station," Moreau replied. Bingham leaped to his feet and followed the operative, calling out to Branton as he went:

"I'll go with him to identify the money. You won't need me here."

A moment later the two who remained heard the whir of the automobile as it fled down the driveway toward the main road to the railway station.

"Birge," Branton said, after a time, "you showed more sense than that detective."

"Oh, I don't know. He suggested the idea in the first place. I followed it up. Besides, he saw that fellow Shannon."

"Who the devil is Shannon?"

"He robbed me once. I have respect for his abilities in that line. That's all."

CHAPTER IV

THE DEAD THIEF

The deal involving $81,500 in cash which had taken G. Mortimer Branton to Moreau's, has no place here. Moreau's house was merely a convenient location for the transaction. Moreau's interest in it was only that of a witness. Bingham took out more funds with him to replace that which was lost. Branton remained overnight with his host, and late in the evening Shaughnessy reappeared at The Fells.

He was shown into the green room where the two gentlemen received him. He laid a white envelope upon the table in front of Branton. It had two pin-holes through one end of it. Also, he put down a copy of the *Herald* of that morning. It also had two pin-holes through the bottom of the third column of the first page of the news-section.

"Lieutenant Holderness found them in Shannon's room in Fourth Street," he said. "They seem conclusive. Can you identify the envelope, Mr. Branton?"

"Yes. Where is the money?"

"Gone. Not found. The envelope was empty."

"Where is Shannon?"

"Dead. He was there all right, but he'd been dead several hours."

"Murdered? For that money?"

Shaughnessy shrugged.

"No. He died naturally enough. Morphine, cocaine, *et cetera*, killed him, the doctors said. Shannon was a

'fiend' in the use of everything in the drug line. That's his record at headquarters. He took too much, or too little, or the cumulative properties of one or more of them did the business. Or, what is more likely, $81,500, in one dose, settled him. It would be a heart-excitant to most men. Anyhow, he's dead."

"But what became of the cash? That didn't die with him. What became of it?"

"He probably hid it away somewhere before he swallowed that last dope. It has been searched for, all right. The floor of his room has been ripped up, the walls have been literally torn open, the furniture has been broken up—there were only three pieces in the room. It hasn't been found."

"Well, you find it, Shaughnessy, and ten thousand of it is yours. Can you get back to the city to-night?"

"Yes; if Mr. Moreau will send me to the station. The last train in is due here in half an hour."

Birge Moreau went out to the garage with Shaughnessy. When the car was ready he waved the chauffeur aside.

"I'll drive you to the station myself, Shaughnessy," he said. "The cool air feels good to me. Get in." As they passed between the gate-posts he asked: "Did you see the body?"

"Shannon's? No. What was the use? Cleary, at headquarters, gave my message to the inspector. He sent Holderness, Baxter, and Marline after Shannon. They had it all cleaned up by the time I got there. The body had been sent away. We made a second search for the money, after I got there. But it wasn't any use."

"Do you think that you can find the money?"

"If Shannon hadn't been a dope fiend, I might. As it is, I don't know. You can't figger out by algebra what a dope'll do."

"That's so. I heard you say that you saw Shannon to-day. How was that?"

"I was at the station when he landed in New York from the one-eight, which was late. Holderness had seen him in the back room at Crewe's gin-mill last night, drunk, or doped, so he said. I knew that Holdy doesn't make mistakes about such things, and it struck me as odd that Shannon should be coming in on the Occidental, apparently all to the good, if he was a wreck last night. Then, when I got out here—well, you know the rest, Mr. Moreau."

"How did it happen that you were sent out here if you were at the station, and on duty, when Mr. Branton's request was made?"

"I blew in at headquarters at the right minute, that was all. Bingham went into the inspector's office just as I got there, and the inspector turned him over to me."

"I see. What do you know about Shannon?"

"Only what's on the records—and that's enough. He used to be the slickest, smoothest, quietest proposition ever, till he got the dope habit. That's why he was called the 'Shadow.' He was just about as easy to catch as a shadow. But he has mostly laid around, doped, for the last six months or more, and we've just let him alone. We knew that he couldn't last long. Even his wife threw him down, and the other guns flagged him whenever they could. There were enough old charges against him to have put him away for a thousand years, but he wasn't worth sending up. Nobody thought he'd ever get another graft. Too doped. But he sure did pull this one off all right, all right. Probably he just fell into it. But you can't expect that headquarters is going to foresee that somebody's going to leave a wad of money lying around the way G. Mortimer did."

"Are you quite sure that Shannon hasn't been fooling

you, down at headquarters?" Moreau asked as he brought the car to a stop at the station platform.

Shaughnessy jumped out before he replied. Nevertheless it was apparent that the character of the question had disturbed him.

"Of course we are," he said, then. "It's a cinch, Mr. Moreau. Ask anybody who knew him. They'll tell you the same. There comes the train. Good night, sir."

"Good night," Moreau replied. Then, as if addressing the steering-wheel, for Shaughnessy had gone, he added: "I'm not nearly so sure about that, my friend."

* * *

"I'm going to the morgue," Moreau said to Branton as they parted at the station in New York the following morning. He had already announced that he anticipated being absent from the city for a few days, and the city, with him, included his home at The Fells, which was only a few miles out. "I have a fancy to see that dead man. I want to be convinced that he is the same person who robbed me, once upon a time."

At the morgue, looking down upon the emaciated shape on the slab, he produced a sketch-book and dexterously, if rapidly, transferred a likeness of the dead Shannon to one of its pages. From there he was driven to his studio, for Birge Moreau was a successful artist of unquestioned skill.

Rumor said that he had other sources of income than his brushes. Certain it is that he lived extravagantly, spent money lavishly, and that the supply never seemed diminished. He exhibited rarely, but always with achievement. His subjects were unique, and widely diversified.

Artists are licensed cranks, free-booters of conventionalism. Eccentricities are assets with them, and

Moreau went the limit in that respect. He did it always with apparent unconcern, and he never explained. The consequence was an intangible coat of mystery, and mystery is ever attractive. Hence, Moreau was everywhere a favorite. Men and women liked him, and said so.

"His favorite stunt is the disappearing act," an acquaintance had said of him once. The truth of it was exemplified that morning. But he worked more than an hour at his easel before he disappeared.

It would seem that the dead Shannon had fulfilled a great desire in the soul of the artist, for he put the sketch he had made at the morgue in a holder beside his easel and began at once to make another drawing from it.

His second effort was almost life-size. It was bold and well drawn, and looked at once older, and younger, than the dead man on the slab. He plumped the sunken cheeks, squared the narrowed shoulders, broadened and filled the hollow chest, set the eyes somewhat wider apart, straightened the slightly up-tilted nose, changed the dead man's pathetic sneer to an offensive one, and stood back a few paces to view the result.

It was a copy, and not a copy of the sketch. It was what Shannon might have been like in the enjoyment of perfect health.

Moreau nodded with satisfaction, and drew up a second easel beside the first one.

After that, his crayon skimmed over the drawing-paper with rapid, forceful strokes. He glanced occasionally at the other drawing and at the smaller sketch, but it was plain that he was working more from memory than from them. And this last drawing he made developed rapidly into an undeniable likeness of Shaughnessy, the operative from headquarters.

"I couldn't see it myself," he said aloud, standing away

from the picture and pursing his lips contemplatively. "It needed the hand, to aid the eyes, to develop it, a little at a time. But it's there. I wonder if it is true? I wonder!"

Moreau put the drawings away inside a big portfolio. Then he went into another room at the rear and closed and locked the door after him. He was busily engaged there for another hour, and then he went out by a different means than his entrance. It was a great building that held his studio, and fronted upon two streets.

Birge Moreau had disappeared.

CHAPTER V

THE HOLLOW SIGN

Detectives Shaughnessy, Holderness, and Marline walked out from police headquarters together shortly after ten o'clock that night. Their destination was Crewe's, a resort much better known to the police and to the dwellers in the underworld than to the average citizen. One of the stereotyped police duties was to visit the place nightly, and these three were supposed to have direct supervision over it, since it was within their district.

Crewe expected them, and would have felt neglected had they not appeared. Crewe's patrons anticipated their coming, and greeted them with nods of indifference when they entered, or ignored them, according to their humor. Occasionally a man or two would slink away before they came, to reappear after their departure; but for the most part they remained, surlily quiescent while the "bulls" were among them, but with their bristles up, like cats in the presence of not unfriendly dogs.

"Branton offered me ten thousand if I could cop the swag, and it's a cinch that Shannon-the-Shadow got it," Shaughnessy told his companions again, on the way to Crewe's, for they had been discussing the subject for two hours. "There ain't any time-limit on it, either. Besides, if we play it right, I think he'll add another five—and that would make five apiece."

"And we divvy straight no matter who gets it, or if

arry one of us gets it, or if we all get it together," said Holderness.

"Share and share alike. Sure, we'll cop it all right, sooner or later," Marline commented. "But Shannon was never to Crewe's with it, Shaughnessy. He must have got it about one o'clock, he was back in the city with it by two, he was dead by four or five, an' he never came to Crewe's at all. Yez can bank on that."

"It was his hangout," said Holderness. "His room ain't ten minutes away from the place. He didn't hide the stuff in his room, or anywhere in that house. I'll swear to that. Nothin' short of a fire could search it any cleaner than we did. It was seven-ten when we found him. The doc said he'd been dead then two hours, an' mebby three. What we want to find out about is everywhere he went, everything he touched, and everybody he saw, between two and five. . . . What are you goin' to do inside, Shaugn?" Holderness added, coming to a halt at the step down, before the entrance to Crewe's.

"Get the bunch to talking about Shannon and telling stories about him. They'll open up, now he's dead. They like to talk—when it's safe. We'll just be sociable."

"Mebby you think them guns won't know that we're after something."

"All the better, so long as they don't savvy what it is. We'll be mixers to-night."

"Hold on a minute," said Marline. "Suppose Shannon turned the swag over to Crewe? Mebby he did. I hadn't thought of that. Crewe wasn't here last night, Shaughnessy, so mebby he was off somewhere soakin' it away. Sure, if I thought *he* had it, I'd pull his joint this very night, so I would. Come on in."

They passed inside then. They had remained for a

moment before entering, beneath the oblong box sign that stuck straight out from the building just above the doorway, and upon which the word CREWE'S could be read by a person approaching the place from either direction. Had any of them ever taken the trouble to notice it, they would have discovered that the box sign was approximately the length, breadth, and thickness of a man's body.

But that fact had escaped the attention of the police as well as of the patrons of the place, as it was intended it should do, and Crewe, the proprietor, had always remained more or less of an unknown quantity to officialdom and crookdom alike.

Crewe was "wise" concerning the people he dealt with and catered to, and he was a student of human weaknesses. He knew that the very last exchange of confidences between persons about to enter a room, or a building, always takes place as the last thing before the door is opened, hence the sign that stuck out over the entrance to his resort—the sign that was approximately the length, breadth, and thickness of a man—the sign which was large enough to contain his own person at times when he wished to see and hear the approach of any person.

Crewe knew, also, nearly to a minute, what time the detectives were due at his place on their nightly rounds. When the three passed inside and closed the door after them, a shutter slipped noiselessly into place along the bottom of the box-shaped sign just over the spot where they had paused while Holderness asked Shaughnessy the question about what he intended to do while he was inside.

Crewe came in at the opposite end of the room soon after the officers entered it. He was in his shirt-sleeves. His never-absent headlight diamond, vaguely described

as "as big as a chunk of coal," gleamed in his immaculate shirt-front. He was a lithe, graceful man on his feet, not over tall, and spare and sinewy.

A sumptuous shock of iron-gray hair, rather long and pompadour, surmounted a face that would have been handsome but for an unfortunate blemish. One side of it was unnaturally white with a deathlike pallor; the opposite side of it was disfigured to actual hideousness by a repulsive, beaded, and knotted birthmark that fluctuated in coloring from unwholesome crimson to reddish brown.

He greeted the three officers with an indifferent nod, and passed behind the bar where he set out bottles and glasses as if he already knew the favorite tipple of each one. The oldest patrons of the place had never known Crewe to take a drink himself.

"I s'pose you know about the 'Shadow,' Crewe?" Holderness asked as he shot the seltzer into his whisky.

"We know most things that happen, here," the proprietor replied indifferently. "What gets me, though, is how you bulls knew about it so quick. Did Shannon have a wireless between his room and headquarters? You blew in at the death-bed scene, didn't you, Holdy?"

"Aw, that was an accident," Shaughnessy spoke. "We'd decided to send him away for his own good on one of the old counts."

"How long before he died did you see him, Crewe?" Marline asked suspiciously.

"Two or three days. All of that—or more."

"I heard he was in here two nights ago," Shaughnessy ventured.

"Well, he wasn't. Whoever told you that, lied."

"Didn't you tell me, Holdy?" Shaughnessy insisted.

"That was three nights ago, Shaugn. Let's sit down. Crewe, bring your siphon along and join us. You can

ask the bunch, too. I'll blow." Holderness picked up his glass preparatory to carrying it to one of the tables.

"Looking for information, are you?" said Crewe, without smiling and without moving. "Take it from me, Holdy, you'll get it quicker if you touch off the fuse at the start, and let 'em all see what kind of dope you're trying to mix with the drinks you're going to buy. We're all children, but we can spell easy ones just the same."

"All right," Holderness replied with sudden resolution. "We want to know who saw Shannon yesterday between two o'clock and five."

He had purposely raised his voice, knowing that everybody in the room was listening, and would hear. Then he turned sharply around and addressed them all generally. "Did anybody here see Shannon yesterday afternoon?"

Silence answered him; and then Crewe replied quietly:

"Cracker says he was in Shannon's room with him yesterday from noon till after two o'clock, if that'll do you any good, Holdy."

The man called Cracker started to his feet from one of the tables, livid with rage and terror—and too much use of the "pipe." He started toward the rear door, but the voice of Holderness held him.

"Come here, Cracker," he said. "You needn't run. You ain't wanted for nothin'. I guess you dreamed that, what Crewe says, didn't you? One of your pipe-dreams, wasn't it?"

"Tell the truth, Cracker," Crewe interrupted before the man could answer. "There's another man here who saw him after you did, and besides nobody but himself is charged with Shannon's death. Tell the bulls what you told me, and let it go at that."

"Him an' me was hittin' the pipe together night before last," Cracker replied in a low tone from the middle of the room where he had stopped at Holderness's command. "We was at Lee Meng's joint till most noon, yesterday. Shadow was purty near all in. We was both broke, an' the chink wouldn't give us any more dope. I had tuh help him home, he was that near chuckin' it, an' I wasn't much better'n that myself. . . . He said he had some pills there, but he didn't—anyhow, he couldn't find 'em. He was shakin' like a leaf when I lit out, an' that was two o'clock. I know, 'cause I saw the clock in a drugstore window where I stopped for a minute wonderin' if I couldn't work the doc, inside. An' that's all I knows about it, so help me."

Shaughnessy thrust himself forward and seized Cracker by the shoulder.

"You lie, Cracker, and you know you do," he half shouted, shaking the man roughly. "Why don't you tell the truth about it?"

"I have told the truth about it," was the dogged reply, although given with trembling. "'Tain't the first time that Shadow an' me have hit the pipe together, either. He didn't do it with nobody else, cos he said he didn't dast to."

"Shut up!" Shaughnessy ordered, and he jerked Cracker around and seated the shaking victim of opium forcibly upon a chair. "You lie, I tell you! Shannon wasn't in the city at all yesterday forenoon. We three happen to know that much about him. He was out of town, and we know where he was."

"He wasn't out-uh town, cos he was with me, I tell you," Cracker persisted.

"Do you mean to call me a liar, Cracker?"

The menace in that question and in Shaughnessy's attitude was intended to be terrifying, but Cracker, who

had managed to catch Crewe's eye, replied with dogged tenacity:

"Nope. But you ain't tellin' the truth when you say that the Shadow wasn't with me all yestady mornin', cos he was."

Shaughnessy, in a rage that seemed unnatural under the circumstances, seized Cracker by the collar and jerked him to his feet. Then he whirled him around and backed him up against the bar and cuffed him brutally with the flat of his other hand. But before he could deliver a second blow, as was plainly his intent, Crewe caught the officer by the wrist and twisted it so that he turned him half around.

"That will do for you, Shaughnessy," he said quietly but forcefully. "I don't permit that sort of thing in here, whether you're bulls or guns—and you know it."

"What the blazes do you mean, Crewe, interferin' with an officer? You go way back and sit down, or I'll run *you* in!" Shaughnessy roared—but he did not offer to renew the attack upon Cracker.

"Oh, no, you won't. And I'll interfere with you every time you try any of your third-degree stunts in my place."

"You will, will you?" Shaughnessy pulled a pair of handcuffs from his pocket, turned, and snapped them upon Cracker's wrists. "You will, will you?" he said again, whirling toward Crewe and striking out viciously with his fist.

But Crewe sprang lightly to one side and out of his reach, even as Holderness attempted also to seize upon him from behind. Then, seeming barely to rest his weight upon his hands as he touched the bar, he vaulted it, ducked beneath it, and the next instant the room was in total darkness.

There was the noise of hasty exits. A chair was over-

turned with a clatter, a table was moved scrapingly, but not an oath nor the sound of a human voice was to be heard, save only the harsh orders of Shaughnessy delivered to his colleagues:

"Front door, Holdy, and quick! Back door, Marl. Keep as many of the bunch here as you can. I'll teach 'em to interfere with me! Cracker, if you move till I find that switch I'll hammer you to a pulp. And Crewe, if you know what's good for you, you'll save me the trouble of looking for that switch."

And Crewe did so—or somebody did it, for instantly the room was brilliantly alight again.

CHAPTER VI

SET A THIEF TO CATCH A THIEF

Crewe was standing with both arms outstretched, his hands clasping the inner edge of the bar, in an attitude of easy grace which was a familiar one with him. He was smiling with easy assurance, and but for the blemish upon one side of his face that smile would have been engaging. Holderness was at the entrance on guard. Marline was at the rear door. Cracker remained where he had been with the handcuffs on his wrists. Shaughnessy stood near him, a gun in his right hand. Crewe's bartender was in the space behind the bar at the window end of it.

Otherwise the room was deserted.

"I'm sorry, Shaughnessy," Crewe said, speaking with deliberation. "My hand hit that switch by accident when I jumped the bar. My face won't stand any more marring, you know. That's why I got out of the way of your fist. Do you want me to go around to headquarters with you? I'll go, of course, if you do."

Holderness and Marline came forward while Crewe was talking. Shaughnessy temporized.

"What did you want to grab me for and interefere with me?" he demanded, still truculent, but minus the savagery. Crewe put out the bottles, the siphon, and four glasses before he replied, placing one of the last which he half filled himself before the handcuffed Cracker. Then he answered:

"I didn't want to see this poor devil mauled, that's all

—and I knew you'd think better of it in a minute. You don't want him, do you?"

"I do, and I'm going to take him." Shaughnessy swallowed his liquor. "Any objections, Crewe?"

"Why, yes, since he hasn't told anything more than what he believes to be the truth, and that because I asked him to. Perhaps he did dream it, after all, or has got his dates mixed. How about that, Cracker?"

"I reckon mebby I ain't sure what night it was," Cracker replied.

"We'll take him along, anyhow, so the inspector can ask him about it," Shaughnessy said. "What do you know about Shannon, Crewe?"

"Nothing."

"Who's that other gun you said had seen him after Cracker did?"

"Did I say that? Well, now, that's funny. I must 'a' been dreaming, too. I don't seem to remember saying it."

For a moment divekeeper and officer looked calmly into each other's eyes across the bar, and the visual duel was a draw.

"Holdy, you and Marl take Cracker along. I'll catch up with you." Shaughnessy waited until they had gone out. "You can douse that red light of yours now, Crewe, and let the bunch drift back again. We don't want any of them. You come along into the back room with me where we can talk."

Crewe did not reply at once. His eyes narrowed and his lips tightened over his white teeth.

"What do you know about that red light?" he asked quietly.

"Oh, I know more'n you think I do, Crewe. I'm more'n seven, and I can walk if somebody takes me by

the hand. You're not the only slick article in New York."

Crewe reached one hand beneath the bar and moved a switch, and a light that glowed in a single red bulb at the end of the box sign over the door was transferred to a green one beside it; but that suggestion of a frown did not disappear from Crewe's eyes. He had supposed that only a select few knew the secret of those two colors. He had been positive until then that the police did not know about it.

He nodded to the bartender and came out. Shaughnessy followed him into the back room and closed the door.

"Crewe," he said shortly, biting his words off abruptly, "eighty-one thousand five hundred bones was copped yesterday, and Shannon got it. If he didn't get it, somebody who was a ringer for him did. Anyhow, it was one of your bunch, and that's a cinch. Well, I want it—see? It was in bills—new ones. Five of them were ten thousand each, and they can't be passed. What's the answer?" asked the detective.

"I'll have to pass it up, Shaughnessy. Have you, by any chance, been hitting the pipe yourself?"

"Well, you think it over, Crewe. I think if those five tens were passed back the balance could stay lost, and there might be five or ten out of the fifty to whack up. You think it over. Mebby you can suggest a place where Shannon might have hid it. See?"

"You mean that you'd want to whack up all that good money that stayed lost, too, don't you?"

"Well, neither of us is down here on a vacation. You think it over. You needn't worry about Cracker. I'll turn him loose in the morning. Now, who's that other guy you said saw Shannon?"

"He is an acquaintance of yours named Crewe," was the quiet reply.

"You—"

"No less, Shaughnessy."

"What time was it when you saw him?"

"Between noon and two o'clock. That's near enough, isn't it?"

"Are you sure it wasn't between two and five, after he got back here with the dough? And didn't he turn it over to you to keep for him?" Shaughnessy demanded with a leer.

"Quite."

"Where'd you see him?"

"I don't seem to remember as to that," was the smiling reply. Shaughnessy grunted his disgust and pulled the door open.

"You think over what I've said," he repeated again and went out. Many of the former occupants of the barroom had returned to their tables, but Shaughnessy looked neither to the right nor the left when he passed them, and beyond furtive-eyed glances in his direction they ignored him.

One of them started to his feet when he saw Crewe through the open doorway in the back room, holding his two index-fingers together in the form of a cross, and he glided unnoticed in the wake of Shaughnessy. . . . Then Crewe beckoned to a second man in the front room, who went to him instantly, and quietly closed the door again.

"Where is your kit, Faber?" Crewe asked him.

"Under me coat. That's why I ducked."

"I've a job for you, and there's a thousand cash for your share. Send Cross after his taxi, and tell him to meet us near the arch in half an hour. He'll get five

hundred for his if we pull it off—and I think we will. You go on ahead."

Faber went out. Crewe left the room by another door and mounted some stairs.

"It looks good to me." He addressed himself inaudibly and chuckled. "I came near losing it; but now, if I don't get that eighty-one thousand five hundred before morning, I miss my guess."

Faber, a professional cracksman, was waiting for Crewe in the square. He got up from the bench and walked beside the master criminal in silence. A little farther along a third person glided noiselessly to the opposite side of Crewe and kept pace with them—that one who had gone out from Crewe's place in the wake of Shaughnessy. Crewe merely nodded in his direction, and the youth—he was barely out of his teens—spoke in a low tone, which even Faber at the other side of Crewe could not definitely overhear.

"He's gone to headquarters, all right; but it's another guess comin' if he'll stay there. Shall I go back?"

"No. Stick."

A taxicab turned upon the square near the Judson Memorial and crept slowly along the east side of it. The three men bore to the right and intercepted the taxi in front of the University Building. It pulled up long enough for them to step inside, Crewe last, and he paused long enough to murmer a direction to Cross, the driver. Bells in the city were ringing midnight. It was two hours early for an expedition of the sort if precedents were followed—but this particular venture was to establish one, it appeared.

The cab conveyed the three men to the vicinity of another square—Stuyvesant—and stopped around a

corner where there was a deeper shadow. The three men got down.

"Keep moving around this block the way you're headed, Cross, always turning to the left so we'll know how to find you," Crewe directed. He crossed Second Avenue with his two companions, and in the middle of it spoke again. "Your beat is from the next corner, down to the cross-town cars, Rat. He'll come that way if he comes, and then it'll be up to you. If you can't get to me in time, you'll have to lead him off, that's all. We're going to his flat."

Crewe and Faber left Rat at the next corner, turning eastward. Their knowledge of the ways and habits of policemen was such that they did not encounter one.

"It's too early, Crewe," Faber grumbled once, but, receiving no response, shrugged his wide shoulders and said no more.

They turned presently into the entrance of a double five-story flat-building. The door had not latched after the last person had passed it, and they carefully pushed their way inside toward the stairway at the middle of the structure.

At the second floor Crewe snapped off the hallway light. At the third he did the same, and paused long enough to put a pair of plumpers into his mouth. Their presence so altered his voice that when he spoke again it was hoarse and cracked and unrecognizable. Then he pulled a hoodlike arrangement over his head. It was thin, and had large eyeholes in it. His cap held it in place, and it drooped to his shoulders. They mounted to the fourth story and stopped.

"Open that door first," Crewe directed, pointing, before he turned off the light. "That flat is vacant. After you've let me into the one opposite it, you'll stand there, in that doorway, and if his nibs comes, nail him.

I don't care how, only get him good and plenty, so we can make a getaway."

"You ain't told me who he is yet," Faber growled.

"You'll know him, all right, when you see him," Crewe replied.

"Who is he?" doggedly.

"The fly-cop—Shaughnessy."

"Say, Crewe, I'll be—"

"You'll be good, and do as you're told," the master interrupted. "Open those doors."

Faber, conquered, opened the door of the vacant flat. He then stepped across the narrow corridor to the other, bent forward a moment, then straightened up with a jerk.

"There's a light in there," he said in a whisper. "You jimmy the door yourself, if you want to. I won't."

He turned abruptly away toward the stairs, but the hand of Crewe fell lightly upon him, and the delicately long white fingers of the man tightened with a painful and convincing grip. There wasn't another word spoken; but after an instant Faber slowly bent to his task again, conquered the second time, and finally.

The dexterity and the utter silence of his work was amazing. Crewe chose his assistants well, and Faber was the ablest of them all. The door swung loose, and a person seated in one of the rooms of that flat would not have detected an unusual sound. Crewe made a gesture, and Faber disappeared inside the doorway of the vacant flat. Crewe waited a moment, then passed silently inside of the other one.

He paused to listen. It was as if he could command the production of a sound if one were latent somewhere, waiting to be made. A flutter of paper, as if the leaf of a book had been turned, reached him. A faint sigh came with it. Crewe glided to the door at the end of

the private hall. It stood ajar, an inch from the casing.

He glanced through, took the chance of the door creaking, pushed it open, stepped swiftly into the room, and across it toward the woman whose back was toward him.

No sound warned her, for Crewe made none. She sensed his presence, or the change of air caused by the open door startled her. But Crewe had anticipated that, and was prepared.

He dropped a pillow-slip, shirred at the open end with cord, over her head, pulling the cord tight around her throat, and he pressed the end of his first finger against her back, between the shoulders, as if it were a gun-barrel.

"Don't speak, and you won't be hurt," he said. "Don't struggle and I won't tie you. Sit still and be silent, and I'll be gone in a short time—and I won't take your shiners, if that's any comfort to you. There's a hole in the top of this thing to give you air. How about it, Jess?"

"Oh, you know me, do you?" she retorted, perfectly cool, knowing that she was helpless. The man's methods were new to her, and they were thorough.

"Rather. Better than you suppose."

He tied several hard knots in the cord.

"What do you want here?" she demanded.

"Never mind. I'll find it." He moved an automatic Colt that was on the table, ready at her hand, out of her reach. Two large diamonds gleamed in her ears, and he touched them with the tips of his fingers. She winced.

"You said—" she began, but he interrupted her.

"I don't want them, and won't take them if you'll be good, Jess. How about it?"

"You win. But you're taking chances, whoever you are with your cracked voice. Brian is due about now."

"Then get busy and pray for him, Jess; for if Shaugn comes before I get through, he'll never get inside. I didn't come alone. Don't forget that I know you better than you think, Jess. I know Shaugn, too, better than *he* thinks I do."

Crewe was occupied while he talked. He glided swiftly from place to place shooting glances toward the woman ceaselessly as he worked. He avoided ordinary hiding-places. His rapid motions, his deftness and thoroughness were surprising. Nothing escaped him; but, also, he did not find what he sought. Within ten minutes he had finished, and he stopped in front of the woman, looking down upon her.

"Will you show me what's in your private bank, Jess, or shall I get it?" he asked.

"You said—" she exclaimed, half starting to her feet, but he pushed her back again.

"I'll stick to what I said. I don't want your money or your shiners. Show me."

She bent forward, and presently produced a chamois pouch, which she held out to him. "There's eight hundred in the roll, besides my jewelry," she said.

He accepted it without a word, and removed the contents. A smaller pouch of chamois he opened, peered into, and closed again. It held only jewels. The money was rolled from end to end, and contained by a rubber band. He opened the roll and discovered a slip of paper, which he studied for a moment. Then he restored the whole in its original condition to the chamois pouch and returned it to her.

"Nothing doing, Jess," he said. "Put it back."

While she restored the chamois pouch to its hiding-place Crewe turned his back to her, his mind intently

upon the contents of that scrap of paper inside the woman's bank-roll. He lifted his eyes to a mission clock in one corner of the room. He had already searched it. On the mantel he had found an extra pair of brass weights.

He moved swiftly toward them, carried them to the clock, and changed them for the pair in use. He dropped those that he took from the clock into his coat-pockets, heavy though they were. Then, without another word to the woman, he left her.

Crewe stepped from the private hall into the corridor and ran plump into Shaughnessy in the utter darkness. Shaughnessy swore, and that betrayed his identity. Then he struck out with his fist.

CHAPTER VII

THROWING A SCARE INTO CREWE

FABER'S jointed jimmy, pouched like a trout-rod in a short leather case to fit in the pocket handily, fell upon the back of Shaughnessy's head when he made that bash at Crewe in the darkness. The blow fell almost noiselessly, and Crewe sustained the man as he slipped toward the floor, and laid him silently upon it.

Crewe remembered the automatic that he had moved beyond the woman's reach, and he hurried down the four flights of stairs in the wake of Faber, who fled upon the instant that he delivered the blow. They did not see each other again until they met at the taxicab. Faber was inside of it when Crewe found it. They drove around the block twice after that, but Rat did not appear.

Faber left the cab at Sixth Avenue and Fourteenth Street.

"There's a thousand to your credit at my place when you want it," Crewe told him. He got down at the arch later and walked across Washington Square, after assuring Cross that the night's work had netted five hundred for him.

Crewe arrived at his own place at one o'clock. But the instant he opened the door he closed it again. Then he shot his hands into his coat-pockets, and dropped the two brass weights he had taken from Shaughnessy's flat, through the iron grating into the cellar. He had straightened up again, and appeared as if he had not

moved, when the door was jerked open from the inside, and Lieutenant Holderness rushed out, followed by Detective-sergeants Marline and Baxter.

But they did not seize him, as they had evidently intended to do. There was an indefinite something about him which was always dangerous. It awed crooks as well as policemen, and both, without understanding it, held aloof from too strenuous contact with the man.

Crewe stood with his hands carelessly inside the pockets from which he had tossed the two weights to temporary safety. He was thinking rapidly. The blotched side of his face showed under the light above the door. He wasn't pretty to look at just then, because he was frowning, and a scowl imparted a sinister aspect to that blemish.

The three officers grouped themselves around him so that he could not get away, and he passed on inside the barroom. It was deserted, save for the bartender. The officers followed him inside and closed the door, locking it. He appeared not to notice.

"Time to close up," Crewe said to his assistant. Then he performed the same coup that he had executed once before that same night, and he did it with the agility of a cat.

He touched the bar with one hand and vaulted it, and dropped behind it out of sight, all in the same instant. Then the lights went out, and Holderness swore, and Marline called Crewe a bad name, and Baxter ducked in the darkness that followed, although his companions did not know that.

Holderness had gone there prepared for lights out. He pulled a flashlight from his pocket and ran around the end of the bar. He felt a draft of air, and he heard a sharp click, but he saw nothing. Neither Crewe nor his bartender was there.

With the aid of his flash, Holderness found the switch and turned on the electrics. The three officers were the only occupants of the room.

"Well, what do you think of that!" the lieutenant exclaimed. "Get outside, in front, Marl. The yard in the rear for yours, Baxter. Who'd have thought of the beer-trap behind the bar!" he added, addressing himself.

But there wasn't any beer-trap there, he discovered. The beer was drawn direct from the cellar through lead pipes, and the stairway was at the rear end of the barroom. Holderness was several minutes deciding that the two men had managed to get to it in the brief darkness, and then he went into the cellar. It was as deserted as the barroom.

Holderness returned to the saloon. He looked around him, grinning and scowling at the same time, amused and annoyed. Then he shouted:

"Hey, you! Crewe! Come out! What did you think? That we was goin' to pull you?"

The only reply was that the lights went out again, and this time, when Holderness found the switch, it had not been touched. He was swearing with thoroughness by that time. Marline and Baxter stepped to their respective doors and asked what had happened.

"You might as well come inside," Holderness told them. "There's a candle behind the bar. I'll light that." He found it with the aid of his flash.

"Crewe don't scare worth a cent," said Baxter. "I told you that. It wasn't the way to work him at all. Now he's beat it. We might as well go back."

"I've a good notion to send for the wagon and rip this place inside out," Holderness said savagely.

"And get yourself 'broke' for doin' it," said Marline. "What's the use? Crewe's better feed for us here than

if he was sent up. We didn't want him, anyway. We only wanted to throw a scare into him."

Holderness had gone to the upper end of the bar and seized upon the telephone. He slammed it back upon the counter with a bang. "That's cut off, too," he said sourly.

There was a rushing noise of wheels and a sharp, grating sound of a brake applied in the street. Heavy footsteps crossed the sidewalk. A bulky figure loomed in the open doorway against the lights outside, and halted, peering uncertainly into the darkness. The three men inside the room recognized their colleague Shaughnessy.

"What the—" they heard him begin, and stop.

The three detectives inside the barroom thought so, too. The appearance of Shaughnessy warranted it. He was without a hat, and was holding his gun in his right hand ready for use. They could see him, but he could not see them; and not one of them cared to speak, lest Shaughnessy should shoot at the sound of the voice before he recognized it. Then something very much like magic saved the situation. The lights flared on again.

Shaughnessy blinked, and stared into the room at his three fellow officers.

"Where's Crewe?" he demanded. It was the question uppermost in his mind. He did not voice his surprise at finding Holderness and the others there.

"Search *me!*" said Holderness.

"Who turned on those lights?"

"I suppose Crewe did. He switched 'em off."

"He is here, then?"

"He was here; he ain't now. That bug you put into us about his havin' that dough, or knowin' where it is, got our goats, that's all. We took Baxie in the game, as you suggested, and came down to make a play for it."

"When? When did you get here?"

"Oh, about twelve-thirty."

"Was Crewe here then?"

"Sure. Up-stairs."

"Did you see him?"

"See him? No. But he came in purty soon after Christy sent him word that we was here."

"Which way did he come in—from up-stairs or from the outside?"

Shaughnessy entered the room and closed the door. Then he went around behind the bar and helped himself to a drink while Baxter replied instead of Holderness.

"Well, he didn't exactly come in just then—not so's you could notice it. He looked in, saw us here, and ducked. We rushed the door after him, and there he was standin' as peaceful as you please, waitin'."

"Which door? How many times have I got to ask that question?"

"That one," Holderness replied, pointing toward the front entrance.

"Go outside, Holdy, and show me exactly what Crewe did. I've got a reason for asking."

"Where's your hat, Shaugn?" Marline asked as Holderness was passing outside.

"Shut up!" Shaughnessy replied.

Holderness acted out what Crewe had done, then stepped back and demonstrated how they had found him when they rushed the door. Shaughnessy ran to the door and looked about, outside of it. He returned, took the still-lighted candle from the back bar, found the cellar-stairs, and descended. The others followed him wonderingly. Shaughnessy went straight to the front of the cellar and stood beneath the grating. He bent over and examined the black dust on the ground under it.

"Have you been down here searching?" he demanded, turning sharply upon his companions.

"I have," Holderness said. "I was looking for Crewe when he disappeared. Say, mebbe you can tell—"

"Did you find anything?"

"No. Not a blessed thing."

"There, I mean—under that iron grating."

"No. Not a thing. What's eatin' you, Shaugn?"

"For the love of Mike, what were you fellows doing here, anyhow?" Shaughnessy did not wait for an answer. He started up the stairs again and they followed.

"You've come pretty near bulling the whole thing, getting fresh," he said at the top of them. "Get along now, and leave me here. Crewe'll come back when you're gone, and I want to see him. I wouldn't want the district inspector to blow along this way and find all four of us here, anyway. He'd want to know why. Light out, all of you. You're a fine bunch of detectives, you are. I don't suppose it ever occurred to any of you that Crewe dropped something through that grating when he backed out of this room, did it? And if you'd had your senses about you—oh, what's the use? Get out, will you, and leave me here? I want to see Crewe —*now!*"

"Shaugn," Holderness said, coming up close, and with an ugly look in his eyes, "are you thinkin' about givin' us the double-cross?"

"Double-cross nothing! You're giving it to yourselves if only I could make you see it that way."

Grumblingly they went out. When they had gone Shaughnessy locked the front door and seated himself at one of the tables so that he faced the door at the rear. His back was toward the bar, and the fingers of his right hand were clasped tightly around an automatic that he

held flat upon the table but with the muzzle of it pointed directly at the door he was watching.

He sat there for a long time without moving, and without taking his eyes from the door. Then he was startled, and seemed to shrivel when a quiet voice from behind him said:

"Take your hand off that gun, Shaugn, and turn around."

Crewe had returned as mysteriously as he had gone away.

CHAPTER VIII

A SHOW-DOWN

It had not occurred to Shaughnessy as a possibility that Crewe could approach from behind him. He had seen to it that there was no trap behind the bar, and he had locked the front door. The only means that he believed Crewe could make use of to enter there, he had kept covered.

Had he intended to shoot when Crewe appeared? He did not know himself . . . but he sat very still when Crewe spoke to him, until four quarter-seconds had ticked away. Then he turned.

"Move to the next table, Shaugn, and leave the gun where it is," was the next order. Shaughnessy obeyed it. "What are you back here for, and why did you send the other three here ahead of you?"

"I didn't send them; and you know well enough why I'm here."

"Oh, do I? I'm not a mind-reader."

"Who'd you take with you to my house to-night?"

"To your house?"

"Well, it's all the same as mine, and I guess you know it. I'm pretty much at home there. You had a hood over your mug when I grabbed you, but I knew the feel of you all right. Who was behind me in the dark that cracked me on the nut?"

"Dear me!" said Crewe, as he calmly walked around the end of the bar to the table where Shaughnessy had left the automatic, picked it up, removed the magazine,

and stripped the cartridges from the weapon. Then he laid the empty gun at the officer's elbow and seated himself at the opposite side of the table.

"I want to know what you've done with those brass weights, Crewe," Shaughnessy said. "You brought them here with you, you dropped them through the grating into the cellar when you discovered that Holdy and the others were here. Then you switched off the lights and got them again somehow. I suppose there's a secret trap that I haven't got onto behind that bar, but that cuts no ice if there is. If it has come to a show-down between you and me, it's time we had it, Crewe. I take it for granted that we're alone here."

"Christy, stand up," was the only reply that Crewe made, and the bartender arose, grinning, from behind the bar, and leaned upon it. "Bring Lieutenant Shaughnessy a drink. He needs it."

Indeed, the man looked as if he did need something of the sort, for his smooth, baby-skin face flushed to a dark red when he realized that he was not alone with Crewe.

"You meant to plug me before you left here, if there was no other way, didn't you, Shaugn? And all three of those bulls who just went out would have sworn that they were here and that you had to do it to save your own life. You told me once to-night that you were old enough to walk if somebody took hold of your hand, but I don't think you are. What you need is an attendant —with a uniform on."

Shaughnessy swallowed nearly a tumblerful of the liquor he had poured out. Then he leaned partly across the table and tapped it with his knuckles.

"You're throwing a mighty big bluff, Crewe, and I suppose it looks good to you about now," he said.

He spoke in a low tone, so that Christy, who had returned behind the bar, could not hear him.

"Maybe, instead of throwing one, I've called yours, and you've got to lay down, Shaughnessy. You try to play the game with cards up your sleeves, but I happen to have you by the wrist, and you can't use 'em. And now I'll tell you something for *you* to think over while you're on your way home, whether you go there or to Jess Shannon's flat, where you think I was to-night. . . . It is this: It doesn't take a very wise guy to know that she's your wife now, no matter who's she was a year ago. But that isn't what I started to say to you. It's this: They're just itching for your resignation down at the big stone building, and you'd better send it in while there's a chance. It won't do you any good to try for a show-down with me. You won't get it—only in one way, and you won't like that way."

Shaughnessy had remained bent across the table. His eyes gleamed. His complexion had changed from dark red to livid.

"I'll get you yet, Crewe," he ground out, showing his white and even teeth, that were strong like himself. "I'll get you, good and plenty."

"You'll get what's coming to you, all right," was the cold rejoinder of Crewe.

Shaughnessy rose slowly to his feet. His right hand dropped upon the empty gun. His fingers closed around it, and he lifted it mechanically as if it were still deadly in its possibilities, and pointed it at Crewe, who smiled up at him without moving.

It was at that instant that the front door rattled. Crewe started to his feet as the glass of it was smashed into the room beneath several quick blows of a night-stick which shattered it up and down and sideways in an

instant, and the district inspector, in uniform, thrust head and shoulders through the opening.

He had been attracted by the bright lights after closing-hours, and had peeked inside before trying the locked door.

"Christy!" Crewe shouted, and dropped to the floor behind the table to avoid a possible shot as the lights went out, for Christy's fingers had never been far removed from the switch.

Shaughnessy threw the table fiercely toward the spot where he had last seen Crewe, and followed it, striking out in the darkness as he did so.

When Crewe dropped as the lights went out he caught himself with the tips of his fingers against the floor in the position of a sprinter at the start of a race, and, with that feline grace of which he had already given evidence during the night, he sprang to the end of the bar and behind it toward the narrow doorway which he knew that Christy would have opened for him. And he passed through, closing the opening after him, so that the click of it was drowned in the noise that Shaughnessy was making.

The door thus used was that section of the back bar which held the cash-register, with a glass-doored cupboard beneath it that was filled with casegoods, and shelves above it likewise stored. It was no wonder that Holderness had been unable to find it, nor that the district inspector and the roundsman with him, and Shaughnessy were likewise foiled.

The roundsman was sent outside to rap for assistance, the lights were turned on again, for Crewe did not snap off the main switch at another point this time, and the three stories of the old brick structure were ransacked.

There were men asleep in all of the upper rooms but

two, which were supposedly Crewe's and his bartender's. They were old-timers with records, but were not under the ban at the moment, and were let alone. Christy reappeared, blandly unconcerned, by the time the search was finished, and the officers watched him without molestation when he walked behind the bar and began to count the day's receipts in the cash-register, whistling softly while he worked.

The district inspector had nothing to do with the detective bureau. The inspection district, which included several precincts, bounded his immediate world. He was also an upright and capable officer, known to be on the level. Crewe knew that, and so did Christy; that was why he came back, whistling and unconcerned. It was also why the inspector let him alone until he had finished with the cash-register.

"How did you and Crewe get out of here, Christy?" he asked then. "Is there a secret trap or door behind that bar?"

"Secret nothin'," was the half contemptuous retort, and Christy jerked his head toward that door at the rear of the room. "What's the matter with that one? It was good enough for us, inspector. While the lieutenant was mixin' it with the table, we beat it. That's all."

"Where is Crewe?"

"Search me. We took a walk as far as the square. Then he sent me back. I guess he wanted a little more air. He said he'd show up to-morrow. He told me to tell you that he was sorry he had an important engagement and had to hurry."

"Did you ever hear anything like the gall of that crook, inspector?" Shaughnessy demanded hotly. "Christy, I've a notion to pinch you for this."

"Pinch away if you want to, lieutenant. I guess I'd

be discharged in the morning. There ain't nothin' against me, and I was never arrested yet. This is my place, if it *is* known as Crewe's—but that's only its name; and I pay for an all-night license. I guess my record is pretty good, ain't it, inspector?"

"You're all right on the surface, Christy. Whatever's going on underneath will crop out in time. You're not in good company and you're liable to trip. You tell Crewe for me that he'd better drop around and see me at the station-house during the day, to-morrow, if he knows what's good for him."

The inspector turned to Shaughnessy.

"Lieutenant, you can tell me the rest of that story of what was happening here outside—and Christy, you'd better close for the rest of the night. Shaughnessy, where's your hat?"

"He forgot it when he dressed this morning," said Christy, and tossed a golf-cap upon the bar. "Here's a lid, Shaughnessy, if you want it." Then he went soberly about his business of closing for the night, for he knew that they would keep an eye upon him from the street.

"I have traced that wad to Crewe," Shaughnessy told the inspector when they were in the street. He had already related the story of it that concerned the happenings on the train, and at Monterey. "Branton wanted it kept quiet, and it has been, but it's a cinch that Shannon was on that car, and got it, and it's a cinch that Crewe's got it now. I wouldn't know it any better'n I do if he shook it under my nose. It isn't any pipe-dream, either, to guess that maybe Crewe was on that train with Shannon when he got it, and that Crewe worked that extra-*Herald*-in-the-car-seat act."

"Nonsense. If he had been there, and if he had known that Branton had the money with him, pinned inside of

a *Herald*, he wouldn't have known which seat in the car Branton would occupy."

"I don't know about that. Men mostly take the same seats in cars when they're vacant. You'll see it done day after day in the Subway and also on the L."

"Admitting that, then, he couldn't have known that Branton would move away from the window and sit on his own paper, uncovering the other one."

"Maybe not; but Crewe is slick enough, and catlike enough in his motions, to have slipped forward from the rear end of the car and to have swiped Branton's paper and left the other one in its place when Branton was looking out of the window. Anyhow, inspector, Crewe's got gall enough to accept that invitation you left for him with Christy. If he does show up, I wish you'd keep him long enough to send for me. I'd like the pleasure of going through his clothes just once to see what he's got on him."

"Who is Crewe, anyway, Shaughnessy?" the inspector asked in a manner that implied more than the words meant. "If I were your chief, I'd put you on him and tell you to look him up, thoroughly."

"I've tried that. He hasn't got any record—that anybody can find. He's the smoothest proposition that ever came over the ridge, and that's no dream!"

They parted at the next corner.

Shaughnessy returned to the flat. He found the woman still occupied in reading the book that had so absorbed her when Crewe made his unexpected call, but she put it aside and raised her boldly handsome eyes to his when he stood beside her. They were man and wife, but Shaughnessy was a headquarters detective, and "Shannon's Jess" had a police-record. So it hadn't been deemed wise to take the public into their confidence.

She asked, without looking up:

"Well," she said, "was it Crewe?"

"Without a doubt, Jess."

"Did you get what you went after?"

"I got nothing—not even Crewe himself."

"What did you have in those weights that sent Crewe here to get them, and that shot you off on his trail like a sky-rocket?"

"Some papers, Jess, but important ones."

"Come off the perch, Brian. Paper money, more likely, and a wad of it. How much, Brian? You're pretty smart, but you ain't smart enough to let me play the game with you, when you really need me. We'd have had the wad yet if you'd let me in on the deal. How much was it?"

"Fifty thousand dollars in ten thousand-dollar bills in one of the brass weights, and—"

"Stop the swing, Brian. I'm dizzy."

"It's the truth. And there was thirty thousand in the other one."

"For the love of Pete, Shaugn, where'd you get it?"

"Never mind that. The point is that I haven't got it now, and that Crewe has. The big bills won't be any good to him unless he can find a way to euchre Branton into buying 'em back. But the rest of it—"

"What's the matter with the big ones?"

"The banks have got their numbers, and their series. Oh, let's forget it for a while. I'm near crazy with it all. What have you been up to, Jess, all day?"

"I've had a call—from one of the real things, too; one of the swells from Swelltown, and I'm to have my portrait painted in oils. My, but he was some ginger! Here's his card—Mr. Birge Moreau. Um-tee-umm! I'm to sit for him as a model for Juno in a work of art that he is creating," she added with fine mimicry.

Shaughnessy sat staring without answer, and she went on. "He saw me in the street and realized instantly that I fulfilled his dream of Juno—anyhow, that's what he said. And he followed me home. And when he saw the address, he made bold to come inside. And when he saw the way the flat is furnished, he wasn't so flip about it. But he remembered the street and number again, and offered me a hundred dollars for three sittings—fifty down, and fifty when he calls three strikes, and out. Did I take it, says you?" She bent toward him. "He's a swell, all right, with money and jewels, *and* other things worth having; and if I don't get the lay of the land, and a few wax impressions, and so forth, while those sittings are going on, you can say that I'm as dead as Shannon is—believe me! Say, Brian, it's a pity that Shannon's dead, ain't it, honey?"

"You'll do nothing of the sort, Jess," the man said savagely.

"Won't I? You watch my smoke, mister. There's another thing that I haven't told you. Mistuh Boige Moreau told me where you got that big wad, Brian."

"Wh-a-a-a-t?"

"Well, he told me all about how it was lost yesterday, and when you told me just now what was inside of those weights I could guess where you got *that*, couldn't I? Gee, but it's too bad that Shannon's dead! I wondered what killed him."

She laughed aloud.

CHAPTER IX

POSTMARKED 5 P. M.

"SHANNON passed it up to somebody," was Shaughnessy's greeting from the inspector at headquarters the following morning. "Branton's secretary, Bingham, had me on the phone half an hour ago. They've had a letter offering to return the five ten-thousand-dollar bills for an even ten in smaller bills, and no questions asked."

"Crewe. He's been quick about it," was Shaughnessy's thought, but he did not speak.

"I sent Holderness down to get the letter, and to look up the postmark, and letter-box where it was dropped, and all that. The envelope was addressed with printed letters cut from a newspaper and pasted on. Just sent to G. Mortimer Branton, New York City. The down-town address was added in the post-office station, and the red stamp which says: 'Deficiency in direction supplied by the New York postoffice,' so there should be no difficulty in discovering from what box it was collected."

"I could tell you who sent the letter, now," Shaughnessy said boldly. In that moment he had made up his mind to play the game for the limit. "It was Crewe."

"Holderness made that gallery-play, too. But you've got to prove it."

"I'd like to have your authority to tell Crewe to come here to see you, inspector."

"I'll give you the authority when you show me a

reason for it. We're not working off personal grudges in the matter, Shaughnessy. That reminds me that I might drop you a word of warning on that very point."

"Me?"

"Yes. Somebody's knocking you. Probably it's Crewe. You seem to have it in for him, and so he's getting back at you."

"What about?"

"Cleary, at the telephone, received a message for me a little while ago. It was: 'Tell the inspector to ask Shaughnessy what he was doing at the flat of Shannon's Jess last night, and what was inside of the two brass clock-weights he had there.' What about it, Shaughnessy?"

"Oh, that was a frame-up of mine, inspector," Shaughnessy laughed aloud. "It came mighty near working, too, only I didn't get there quite soon enough. If I had, I'd have got Crewe all right. I dropped enough to lead Crewe to think that Shannon might have passed the stuff on to his former wife, and I told him that once we found some swag at her place, when she lived in Houston Street, inside of some hollow clock-weights," Shaughnessy lied glibly. "Then I went to see Jess and framed it up with her. But it didn't work. I got there too late."

The inspector did not appear to pay much attention.

"You'd better call up Branton's office and connect with Holderness," he said; and Shaughnessy saluted and went out.

But he was cold to his finger-tips, although the morning was hot and sultry. He was cold inside, with a sudden fear of Crewe and Crewe's methods. He had warned Crewe last night that he would "get him," and the saloon-keeper was evidently not letting grass grow under *his* feet in an effort to "get" the operative first.

He telephoned to Holderness, heard what his side-partner had to offer, and then brought Rat from one of the cells and took the youth outside on the street with him. He signaled, unseen by Rat, to one of the new men of the bureau, and the new man trailed after them.

"Turnin' me loose, are you?" Rat said to Shaughnessy, with a furtive but shrewd glance from the corners of his eyes. "You want somethin' for it. What is it?"

"I know that you were stalling last night when you led me that chase down Second Avenue, Rat, and kept me from getting to the place where I was going. I had to collar you and send you down here, and that took time, and that was what you were playing for. Well, you got it. Now take your choice between doing a year on the island, and telling me all about it. Take it or leave it, Rat."

There was another furtive glance from the corners of those bright, ferret-eyes.

"Crewe sent me to watch for you, and lead you off. That's all I know. I dunno where he was goin', 'r what his lay was."

"Who did Crewe have with him?"

"Jes' me."

"There were two of them, Rat. Who was the other one?"

"Search *me*. T' other one must 'a' joined him after he sent me away," Rat lied. "Crewe ain't takin' too many boozim friends into his think-works. You know that."

Shaughnessy nodded. "You can beat it now, Rat," he said. Then he stood still and watched the youth as the latter shot around the nearest corner, with the new man from headquarters following him.

"Harper's got his work cut out for him, trailing that kid," he commented; and went into the Subway. Twenty

minutes later he met Holderness in the street near Branton's office.

"I guess it's Crewe all right," Holderness said, and gave Shaughnessy the letter. It was well that Holderness's eyes were directed elsewhere at that moment, for one glance at the postmark on the envelope gave Shaughnessy the hardest shock he had yet received in connection with the missing $81,500.

The envelope was stamped 5 P. M. the preceding day —seven hours, at the least calculation, before Crewe obtained possession of the brass weights.

CHAPTER X

SHANNON'S JESS

Birge Moreau called out: "Come in!" without turning his head to discover who would take advantage of the permission. "Don't move—not even the direction of your eyes," he added hastily to the model who was posing for him.

He wore a loose blouse that had been made stiff by paint where he had wiped his brushes against it. The thumb of his left hand was grasping a palette—his right hand held a brush that was performing wonders upon a canvas in front of him.

Shaughnessy entered, closed the door, and stood still, waiting. He seemed to have dropped the bearing of a plain-clothes man outside the door. He was the courteous, gentlemanly operative who had gone out to The Fells, at Monterey, with Bingham.

He shot only one comprehensive glance toward the model whose back was turned to him. That was, perhaps, why he thought it wise not to speak until Moreau's eyes had been withdrawn and turned in his direction. He did not care to startle her by the sound of his voice so long as the eyes of the artist were upon her.

Moreau seemed equally determined not to speak, or else his interest in the work he was doing made him forget. Shaughnessy became uneasy and cleared his throat tentatively, but softly. Moreau turned.

"Hello, Shaughnessy," he said with cordiality, and went forward with extended hand. Over his shoulder,

but without turning, he added: "You may rest, Miss Stacey." . . . Stacey was the name over the bell at the flat where Shaughnessy's wife, "Shannon's Jess," wore diamonds and expensive gowns while she read trashy novels.

"Is there something new in regard to the lost fortune? You wouldn't have looked me up otherwise, would you?" Moreau asked the officer.

Jess, relieved of her uncomfortable attitude, walked around behind the artist, and then looked past him toward Shaughnessy, closing one eye in a definite wink as she did so. Then she paid no more attention to either of them, but strolled about with apparent aimlessness, looking at the paintings and curios until at last she passed into another room and disappeared.

"Mr. Branton has received a letter offering a return of the stolen money upon conditions. I thought you might care to see it. Here it is. It was stamped Madison Square at five o'clock yesterday." . . . The operative spoke loud enough for Jess to hear him in the adjoining room.

Moreau read the letter through and gave it back.

"You will respond to it, of course," he said. "You've only to insert two words in the newspaper named, tomorrow morning, to do that. But, really, Mr. Shaughnessy, I have no interest in the matter you know. And—er—I'm very busy."

It was plainly a dismissal, but Shaughnessy came a step nearer to the artist. He jerked his thumb toward the open doorway, past which the model had disappeared.

"Where did you get her?" he asked.

"Her? Oh, you mean Miss Stacey. That's rather an impertinent question, isn't it, Shaughnessy?"

"Do you know who she is, and what she is—or was,

rather? Her name isn't Stacey. It's Shannon. She was Shannon's Jess. She's the woman I referred to when you heard me say, in speaking of Shannon, that even his wife went back on him. She was Shannon's wife all right, and she's been on the level, so far as we know, since she left him. But that's who she *is*, all the same."

"How did you know that she was here posing for me?"

"I didn't, till I walked in and saw her. She's a handsome woman, all right, and I don't wonder that you wanted her for a model—and I guess she's quit the graft for good. You needn't tell her—"

He stopped abruptly in what he was saying, and crossed the room swiftly toward a small table that was littered with a confusion of things, among which were two shining brass clock-weights. He took them in his hands and turned.

"Where did you get these?" he asked sharply and in a tone that was a demand rather than a question.

"Now, that's odd," Moreau replied, shrugging his shoulders. "Miss Stacey asked me the same question. I don't see anything remarkable about them; do you?—except that it's unusual that they should have been thrown away."

He stepped forward and took them from Shaughnessy's hands.

"They're rather curious, too. Look." He twisted one of them between his hands and so unscrewed the bottom of it, revealing the fact that it was hollow within. "I discovered that quite by accident, too," he added.

"Do you mean to say that you found those weights?" Shaughnessy asked, with difficulty controlling his eagerness. "Where? And when?"

"Exactly what Miss Stacey asked me when she saw them. To-day is the 6th of August, Transfiguration day—as you should know. Sometimes I go to church,

and I prefer the early morning for it. This morning I went to St. George's, Stuyvesant Square, and when I came out I crossed one half of the old square to Second Avenue, and walked some distance. I saw those weights in the gutter and picked them up. Perhaps, now that I have been so explicit, you will be good enough to tell me why they interest you? Miss Stacey claims them as *her* property. She says that her apartment was entered last evening while she was temporarily absent, and the brass weights were stolen. Odd things for a burglar to select for spoils; eh, Shaughnessy? I have given them back to her. But your apparent interest in them amazes me—really."

"It's easily explained, Mr. Moreau, by the fact that they belong to Jess. She was Shannon's wife, and the last time I saw them, Shannon had them. He used them to hide away his dope before anybody got onto the fact that he was taking it. When she left him and got her divorce she probably kept them—with the clock. Was there anything inside of either of them?"

"Not a thing, Mr. Shaughnessy. They were empty, even of dope, as you call it."

"How did you find out that they were hollow?"

"Well, you see, one of them was partly unscrewed at the bottom; so, naturally, after I had searched that one I tried the other one. . . . Going? Thank you for bringing the letter. I hope you'll continue to keep me posted."

"Of course," thought Shaughnessy, waiting for the elevator outside of the studio, "Crewe flung them away the moment he got his claws onto what was inside of them; and I was mistaken about thinking that he had dropped them through that grating. Those marks on the coal-dust were made by something else. I wish I could explain that postmark as easily."

Inside the studio, the model came from the retiring-room as soon as Shaughnessy had gone. Before she stepped into her pose, she said:

"He told you who I really am—or was, didn't he, Mr. Moreau?"

"Yes, Miss Stacey. But it would have made no difference even if you had not already informed me yourself."

"Thank you. Mr. Moreau, did you ever hear of a double-cross?"

"Why, yes. It's a slang term, isn't it?"

"Sometimes it is, but that man who just went out is a live one."

CHAPTER XI

BIRGE MOREAU'S SKETCHES

SHANNON'S Jess—Miss Stacey—divorced wife of a professional crook—no matter what she might have been in the past, was, at the time of these passing events undeniably the wife of Brian Shaughnessy, expert operative at the detective bureau, tied by Church and State. She had regretted the fact more than once, but never quite so forcibly as in her thoughts while she posed for Moreau that day after Shaughnessy had gone.

She had been in the past all that her associations had made her. Her instincts were predatory. She was an enemy to society, and she had lost the discriminating power between right and wrong as between the world as we know it, and the underworld to which she belonged. But she believed in being on the level with her kind, and in breaking even with her pals. In a different environment she might, as a girl, have developed into a splendid woman. The instinct for square dealing was born in her, warped and misshapen though it had become.

Once, when Moreau told her to rest, she retained the pose, replying only:

"You'd best make the most of it to-day, Mr. Moreau. I'm not coming back."

He worked on without answering her, thinking while he worked. Then, when he finished and she had gone to the retiring-room to change the Olympian draperies for her street costume, he covered the canvas upon which he had been employed, and from the large portfolio

brought forth the crayon sketches he had made after his visit to the morgue. . . . His first effort after his return to the studio—that one which represented what Shannon might have been in perfect health—he stood upon an easel.

He met her when she came through the doorway and led her toward the easel, facing her around within view of it suddenly, watching her with apparent listlessness.

"Why, it's—" she began, and stopped. Then she turned a pair of startled eyes upon the artist. He nodded gravely.

"Is it like what he was when you first knew him?" Moreau asked.

"A little. But he was never so good-looking. You have made a man of him, and he was never that. He was always a sneak, even when he was a kid. His cheeks were always hollow and his nose always stuck up. You've changed both. And he never in his life looked anything but scared at his own shadow. He looks here as if he'd fight a windmill—and there wasn't any fight in him."

"Do you see any resemblance there to any one else, Miss Stacey?" The question was asked as gently as he might have fanned her with a palm-leaf, but she turned on her heel and faced him, her eyes suddenly cold and hard.

"No," she said. Then: "Why did you make it?"

Moreau shrugged. "An artist's whim," he said. "Curiosity took me to the morgue to see him, and I made this." He showed her the small sketch made at the slab. "Then I got to wondering how he might have appeared before he became addicted to cocain and morphin and the others—and I made that. Then I thought I detected a vague resemblance to some one I had seen the preceding day, and I made this." He pulled a second easel around.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed. "It's Shaughnessy! Well, what have you got to say about that?"

"You know him, then, Miss Stacey, more than by sight?"

"Know him? And him a bull? And me—what I have been? Faith, he's tapped me on the shoulder more'n once." She was all boldness and self-assurance again, and Moreau restored the easels to their former positions.

"I am sorry that you won't pose for me again," he said. "If you should change your mind, let me know." He passed her, going to the door and opening it. She did not move. "Don't forget your brass weights," he admonished her.

"I'll make you a present of them," she replied, crossing to the doorway.

But she stopped at the threshold and turned. "Why did you do it, Mr. Moreau?" she asked. "Make those pictures like that, I mean?"

"I have told you," he replied.

"Well, all my life I've been accustomed to plain speech, so I'll tell you that what you've told me about it are lies. You didn't want to paint any Juno. You wanted to get me here to see those pictures. Why?"

Moreau was silent.

"I wonder how much more you know, or think you know?" she said, and again he did not answer her. She hesitated a moment and came back into the room, closing the door. "What's eatin' you, anyway?" she demanded. "Did you look me up in my flat just because you knew that I was Shannon's widow, or was it because you knew that I was Shaughnessy's wife?"

"Are you Shaughnessy's wife?"

"Sure I am, though I'm sorry for it."

"Since when have you been his wife?"

"Since I divorced Shannon."

"People of your faith do not believe in divorces."

"Don't they? Well, I haven't got any faith—much. Say, what are you, anyhow? One of them fly-cops that tell your profession by looking at your breath on a cold day, and that call themselves criminologists?"

"I'm merely an artist, Miss Stacey. I see characteristic lines in faces that would escape your notice. When I made that sketch at the morgue, it suggested the second one; and that suggested the third one."

"There isn't any doubt about your being an artist, whatever else you are," she said sharply, and went out.

But Jess turned about the instant she had passed the door and reëntered the studio. Moreau was standing as she had left him. He raised his head and smiled at her. She stopped and stood with her back against the door.

"Do you know a man named Crewe?" she demanded shortly.

"I don't think so," he replied, shaking his head. "Who is he?"

"He's a gin-mill operator, if you know what that is. He runs a saloon where crooks hang out when there isn't anything particular against them, and he does it to cover his real business of being director-general to the cleverest bunch of thieves in New York."

"What about him?"

"If you happened to know him, I was going to ask you to make me one of those pictures of him—like you made those of Shannon."

"Why?"

"Something that you said to me gave me an idea. I used to draw some myself when I was little. Free hand, they called it. I used to copy all the pictures I could find. Later I took to copying names in the same way—till I got pinched for it and was sent away. I gave it

up after that. But I used to draw faces of people I knew. I could do it yet, if I tried. Have you got another one of those paper things stretched on frames? I'd like to have a try at it. This being an artist gets me, all right."

Moreau arranged a stretcher of clean drawing-paper on one of the easels for her and put a tray of crayons beside it for her selection.

"Now, you stand over there and pose for me," she said. "I just want to see if I can do it. I won't keep you more'n five minutes."

"So it's to be a portrait of me, is it?" he asked as he took the place assigned to him.

"You wait," she replied, and began to work, lifting her eyes sharply to his face and delivering rapid strokes with the crayon which told him that she at least felt assurance in what she was attempting.

The five minutes' time she had asked for lengthened into ten, and then fifteen, but at last she tossed the crayon upon the tray and stepped backward to view what she had done. Moreau came around to her side and a trifle behind her, and looked at it also.

"But that isn't a picture of *me*," he told her.

"No. It's a picture of Crewe—the man I was talking about. *I've* got the artist's eye, too, and I can see lines of character that escape others. I have done what you did. You made a picture of Shaughnessy from two pictures of Shannon. I have made a picture of Crewe, the master-thief, from the original of Moreau, the master-artist. If Shaughnessy's Shannon, you're Crewe. See the point?"

"It's a trifle vague, but I think I understand what you mean."

"And if you had a pair of aluminum plumpers in your

cheeks, I guess it would make your voice sound cracked, too. Do you get me?"

"I don't in the least know what you are talking about, Miss Stacey; but if you will be good enough to explain, perhaps I may."

"Oh, stop rocking the boat or you'll fall out. Besides, the wind is rising. You're the real elegant swell up here, aren't you? Say, when you want to call on me again, rap on the door and I'll let you in—only be sure that Brian isn't there when you do it." She crossed to the door and opened it. "And to think that you came mighty near to getting away with it!" she added, and laughed aloud as she banged the door behind her.

CHAPTER XII

THREE OF A KIND

SHAUGHNESSY was waiting at the little flat on the East Side when Shannon's Jess got there. Being the sixth of August, the day was hot and he had removed his coat, waistcoat, collar and tie, and rolled up his sleeves. She was surprised to find him there and did not hesitate to tell him so.

"You're gettin' daffy, Shaugn. You know better than to come here in the daytime," she said sharply.

"Maybe I won't come again day or night—maybe there won't be need to," he retorted, meaningly. "I want to know what that dude artist is chasing you for, and what's the meaning of all this play about your going there to pose for him. There's a nigger in the fence somewhere, and that's a cinch."

"And you're seven different kinds of a fool, and that's a cinch, too."

She started across the room toward a door, but he left his chair and stood in front of her, barring her way. She stopped and took a step backward, farther away from him, but not the least sign of fear showed upon her countenance.

"None of that, Brian. I've got a stinger, and it's been dipped in poison. You'd better not try to draw it," she told him, and drew backward another step. He stood his ground, but he did not advance.

"I've been thinking about that brass-weight puzzle, Jess. I believed, before I made that call upon Moreau,

that Crewe got them from here, carried them to his place, and dropped them through the grating into his cellar when he found Holdy, and Marl, and Baxter there. But I'm reading it differently now. I was all wrong about Crewe. It was Moreau who was here, and you gave him the brass weights, and the posing as Juno was a blind, and you went there to-day to divvy and you both thought you could get away with it and fool me! . . . I understand that 5 P. M. postmark now. I understand a lot of things that I didn't guess before. You always were stuck on drawing pictures and on artists who could do it better than you, and you found what you wanted when you found him and his handsome face and elegant manners; and I guess he found what he wanted when he picked you for his Juno. Well—he can have you. And you can have him. But you've got to cough up that dough first."

"Is that all?" she asked him calmly.

"Nearly. He's got enough without that. When he gets you he'll have more than enough, as he'll find out. I'll be well rid of you, Jess. You've been a mill-stone around my neck for a good while. We'll break even. You go your way along with Moreau and I'll go mine—only, I want that dough. All of it. Every last dollar of it."

"Suppose you don't get it?"

"Then I'll get you. And *him*."

They spoke in ordinary tones. There was no sign of excitement about either of them save in the light in their eyes that held each other's gaze without wavering on either part.

For a moment she was silent. She appeared to be considering all that he had said to her. He thought that was what she was doing. *Men know women least*

when they think they understand them best. When she did speak, she surprised him.

"I guess you're right about breaking away," she said in the same even tone. "I don't think I ever understood until to-day what a low-down, despicable, cowardly double-crosser and sneak-thief you are, Shaugn. But we're not sticklers for little things when we're crooks, are we? I've been watching you ever since you let Terry die the way you did. Maybe you killed him—I don't know. It would be like you. You'd let me die the same way, or help it along in the same way if you weren't just a little bit afraid of me—and if you didn't know that I'm not even a little bit afraid of you. As for the brass weights, and what you say was in them, you're talking through your hat. I don't know anything about the dough you're talking about, but if I had it, you wouldn't get it."

She spoke rapidly although her voice was not raised. The contempt of her manner and tone and attitude cut him like a lash. But he did not move while the words flowed from her. The pupils of his eyes dilated; the lids narrowed. The fingers of his hands crooked rigidly. When she finished he moved one foot in a half-step toward her, but she thrust her right hand through the side placket of her walking skirt, and he stopped.

"You'd better not try it," she said coolly, and without flinching. He did not take his eyes from her or change his attitude. When she came into the flat she had slammed the door after her, but the latch had been imperfectly repaired since Faber had jimmied it, and did not catch. Neither of them knew that. "You'd better not try it," she repeated, seeing him moisten his lips with the tip of his tongue. It was a sign that she understood.

His muscles flexed in the motion of making a spring. Her hand was half withdrawn from beneath her skirt.

Neither moved more than that. A voice, cool and determined, interrupted both acts.

"Jess is right, Shaughnessy. And there's a witness present," it said.

Crewe, the blemish on his face glaring red at them, stood in the doorway to the private hall.

"You'd better beat it, Jess," he added. He leaned carelessly against the casing of the doorway dressed precisely as when Shaughnessy last saw him. His hands were inside his coat-pockets and there was a latent something about him that was suggestive of incredible swiftness of action. He wasn't the man to have interrupted them without ample means at hand for offensive defense.

Shaughnessy swallowed hard, bringing a lump into his throat which disappeared slowly. He had put all heavy, cumbersome things out of his trousers-pockets when he stripped himself of his outer clothing because of the heat, and was practically defenseless. He remained where he was, staring without speaking, helpless. Jess moved nearer to a window but kept her hand through the slit in her skirt.

"I guess I owe you one for this—Crewe," she said with a suggestive pause between the two last words which neither of the others seemed to notice. "He'd have killed me, or I'd have killed him, if you hadn't butted in. That was a pretty good play for you, chasing me down here, and I won't forget it when it comes to a show-down between us. Just keep that position, will you, for a minute? You'll keep yours, too, Shaughnessy, if you know what's good for you. This isn't any polite say-so that you're up against, although you don't know it."

She crossed to the chair where Shaughnessy had hung his coat. His gun and his shot-filled billy were on the same chair. She stripped the one of its cartridges and she cut the lacings of the other and let the shot drip

through the open window into the flagged yard below.

"I guess that draws your teeth, Brian," she said, "but Mr. Crewe doesn't want you to be in a hurry about going—not just yet. Now, *Mr.* Crewe, can I use that telephone?"

Crewe replied without taking his eyes from Shaughnessy, for it was plainly apparent that the man was in a dangerous mood and would not hesitate to take chances if there should be opportunity.

"It depends upon what use you want to make of it, Jess," he said.

"I'm itching to call up a friend of mine to ask him if he'll take me in. Brian's jealous of him, too, so you'd better keep an eye out for trouble."

"Go ahead then, only no double-crossing, mind."

"I'm not that kind and you know it."

"All right. I can hear what *you* say."

"I'll have to look in the book for his number. I haven't learned it yet." She began to turn the leaves. "Maybe you know him, Crewe. He's an artist—name of Moreau—keeps a swell studio where he draws pictures of dead men—and live ones, too. I saw one there to-day of Shannon—he made that one down at the morgue. I saw another one there of Shaughnessy—he made that one from Shannon's. Here's the number." She paused with her hand upon the receiver but without lifting it from the hook. "Maybe you know him, Crewe, and maybe you'd rather I wouldn't telephone."

"That depends upon what you want to say to him. But I can listen, so go ahead. Only be quick about it," Crewe replied.

She hesitated another instant with her eyes narrowed and fixed studiously upon Crewe's marred face. Then she asked for the number. After a moment they heard her say:

"This is Miss Stacey speaking. I wish to talk to Mr. Moreau. Are you Mr. Moreau? . . . Yes." . . . She shot a quick and thoroughly puzzled glance toward Crewe, but his eyes were upon Shaughnessy and he did not see it. She continued, still with her eyes upon Crewe: "I wanted to say that I have changed my mind about the sittings, provided you could use me again today. . . . That's too bad about the light, but I think I'll go up there to see you, anyway. . . . Good-by."

She put back the receiver and stood upright. She had not removed her hat, and was ready for the street. There was a perpendicular line of perplexity between her brows as she looked sharply at Crewe. She said to him:

"You're boss here now, and you're a wonder. Take it from me, you are all that. Can I go out?"

"Sure. Why not? Nobody's keeping you, Jess. You've pulled Shaughnessy's fangs, and I'll let him chase along after you up to the artist's as soon as I've had a word or two more with him. But Shaugn isn't feeling good, and you'd better get there in time to warn that artist chap that's stuck on you."

"Oh, he isn't stuck on me Crewe; but I'll give it to you straight that he's going some, in *my* regard, just now—or you are!"

Crewe moved aside out of her path, but she paused in the doorway and looked back.

"You'd both better beat it out of here rather sudden," she said. "I shall send in the first cop I see."

"Shaughnessy," Crewe said after she had gone out, "I'm rather sorry that I butted in upon that domestic-felicity scene, only I shouldn't wonder if somebody'd been hurt if I hadn't. But I knew you were here, and I came because I wanted to see you. I found the door partly open and I walked inside. What I came for was to ask

you what the district inspector wants to see me about? And likewise to ask you if you think I'd better go alone to see him? You know what's likely to occur if I do that, in case he should happen to get too fresh, don't you? You can sit down now and eat candy if you want to while you're thinking up proper answers to my questions."

"You bet your life I know what'll happen, Crewe. You'll go up the river."

"All right. Take it that way if you like. But I'll have company."

"You bet you'll have company! Your whole bunch'll go with you."

"And Shannon."

"Shannon's dead."

"*The* Shannon isn't dead—not yet. But he certainly is taking big chances of being a dead one right now. Terrence Shannon that never had wit enough to pick a pocket and get away with it, or courage enough to jimmy a window and climb inside, is dead. That's no lie. But Brian O'Shaughnessy Shannon, with the wit and the courage, I've named, and with the cunning of the devil himself, that married Jess Stacey and brought her over here when she was too young to know better, and that made a crook of her, and used her forgeries till she got pinched for it and sent up, and that joined the police because he thought it would give him a better chance for thieving, is *alive*, and he's trying his best to look me in the eyes this minute—and can't! I don't know whether you killed Terry, or not, but he seems to have died mighty opportunely. And he was your relative and you made a goat of him. He has done time for you twice, for things that he didn't do, and you did. And you were on that train with Branton and got the wad, somehow. And you laid it to the other Shan-

non. . . . And you let him die, or killed him, Heaven knows which. And you sent him to the morgue and will let him go to the potter's field. *And you call yourself an Irishman!* Now, do you go around to see the inspector with me and tell him it's all a mistake? Or don't you?"

"You win, Crewe," Shaughnessy replied.

"I thought I would, Shaugn."

"But I can't afford to be seen on the street with you, Crewe. You go on, without me. You just walk straight into the station-house where Duneen has his headquarters, in an hour from now. You'll find me there. And I'll have it all fixed with him before you get there."

Crewe appeared to hesitate.

"All right," he said finally. "No double plays, mind you."

"No. You win. What's happened to-day is wiped off the slate. Say, you'd better make that two hours from now. Call it six o'clock. Duneen's sure to be there then."

"And you want time to chase after Jess, don't you?"

"Maybe I do. What of it?"

"Nothing. So-long. Six it is. Got anything more to say to me?"

"No."

"About Branton's wad?"

"No."

"You're not feeling so dead certain that I've got it, are you?"

"I'm pretty sure that you haven't. Sure enough to tell you that if you have got it, you can keep it. Sure enough to say that if you can get it before I do you can keep it, and that if I get it before you do, you won't get a smell."

"Good. Then it's an even play between us for the eighty-one-five, and no favors, and no divvy?"

"Just that."

"So-long, Shaughnessy. I'd advise you not to kill that artist."

Shaughnessy lost no time getting into his outer clothing. He gazed ruefully at his gutted billy and stuffed the shell of it into one of his pockets. Then he restored the cartridges to his gun and was hastening toward the door when his glance fell upon a small parcel that Jess had brought into the room with her, had laid upon the table, and had apparently forgotten when she went out. He tore the paper wrapping away and disclosed a small pasteboard box. Inside the box, neatly packed, were four squares of wax, and upon each square the impression of a key was perfectly outlined. Experience told him that they represented both sides of two Yale keys.

"I've got time enough," he said aloud, replying to his thought. He knew that Jess's threat to send up the first cop she met had been an empty one. He was also quite certain that she would not return to the flat till after seven that night, when she knew he would report at headquarters for duty.

He ran down the stairs to the street, carrying the box with him. A basement locksmith in First Avenue greeted him by name a few minutes later.

"How quick can you make those two keys for me—for a five-spot?" he demanded, exposing the squares of wax. "I've got to prove a case and I ought to have them now."

"Two or three hours, maybe," the locksmith replied, inspecting the impressions.

"I'll give you an hour and a half and no more, and you get five for the job. If you fail me or mar that wax

so that anybody'll know it's been used, I'll break you in two when I come back."

Shaughnessy went out again. Thirty minutes later he pressed the button beside Moreau's studio door.

There was no answer, and he held his thumb against it for several moments. Then he descended in the elevator and sought a telephone. He recalled the number as Jess had pronounced it at the flat. He got a reply at once.

"Hello!" he said. "This is Shaughnessy. Are you Moreau? If you are, why didn't you answer your doorbell just now, when I rang it?"

"Because it didn't ring. It is disconnected. I don't wish to be disturbed," came the reply, and Shaughnessy was sure that he recognized the artist's voice.

"But this is Shaughnessy, I tell you."

"That makes no difference. I cannot be disturbed. Good-by."

"Hey! Wait a minute. My—that is—confound it, Jess is there and I've—"

Click went the instrument, and he knew that the receiver at the other end of the wire had been replaced on the hook. If he could have sent sudden death over that wire into the studio he would have done it then. He got Central again, but after repeated trials the operator calmly informed him that the receiver must have been left down at the number he wanted.

In the street again he thought seriously of returning to the studio and attacking the door, knowing all the time how futile it would be, and that such an act would only redound to his own discredit. But he did go up and wait outside the studio door until a few minutes after five o'clock, hoping that one of them or both of them would come out.

Before he came away he pounded upon the door and

called, but there was no response of any sort, and he fled—fled is the proper word to describe his condition of going—to the Subway and thence across town to the locksmith's. He came out again after a moment, returned to his flat, and replaced the wax squares in the same condition, wrapper and all, as he had discovered them. It was evident that Jess had not returned there since his own departure.

"A locked door won't keep me out of that studio to-night," he told himself as he hastened to keep the appointment with Crewe; "and if I find—"

He did not complete the sentence.

* * *

Both men were a trifle late at the appointment. The interview with the inspector was short, but to the point. Crewe had the "riot act" read to him, and received it with becoming meekness. Shaughnessy admitted that he had not a thing in the world against the saloon-keeper. They parted at the door.

At headquarters Shaughnessy found Harper, the new man, awaiting him. Rat was there also, shrewd-eyed, alert, solemn.

"Where'd he go?" Shaughnessy demanded.

"Ask him. I guess he'll tell, all right," Harper replied.

"I went to keep me reg'lar job," Rat spoke up quickly.

He had been rehearsing in his mind what he should say to Shaughnessy, for, figuratively, he had been caught with the goods on. That is to say, he had been doing some preliminary work for Faber when Harper had come up with him, and now he had no idea of giving up the snap to Shaughnessy. Not Rat. It was a coincidence, perhaps, that Harper should have followed him

into and out of the very building where Birge Moreau had his studio, and that Rat, discovering his shadow then for the first time, walked directly up to Harper and demanded:

"Say, what are you pipin' me off for?"

Shaughnessy took no stock in Rat's plea of a regular job. He did not regard it as necessary even to prove or disprove the boy's statement. He was already convinced that Rat lied. Harper spoke up and told the name of the building, and Shaughnessy wheeled upon the lad again.

"So," he said, "you were in *that* building, were you? Who sent you there?"

"The Prince of Wales sent me with a message to King Dodo," was the solemn reply, and it was delivered in such a manner that it was equivalent to his saying "Go to blazes and find out."

And then, as he said it, an inspiration came to him. He recalled that he had seen a certain woman whom he knew by sight, in that building, and had seen her enter one of the studios on the top floor. He recalled, too, that Shaughnessy knew the same woman and that he had seen him with her. He had seen Jess when she went to Moreau's studio to pose as Juno.

When Shaughnessy bent nearer to him, and would have cuffed him for his impertinent reply had there been fewer people in the big room, Rat plunged into the vortex of his inspiration.

"I was there pipin' off Shannon's Jess," he said. "There was a swell that met me in the street yesterday, an' he says to me, s'ze, 'Rat, d'you know Shannon's Jess?' s'ze. 'I do,' s'zi. 'You folly 'r t'-mor' morn'n',' s'ze, 'an' tell me where she goes to,' s'ze. Then, las' night, w'en I was gittin' th' lay uh th' land down around where she lives, you cops me an' sends me here, an' w'en I gits

out this morn'n' I lights down to th' same neighborhood t' pipe 'r off, an' I sees 'r come out, an' I folly 'r. Then his nibs here—I dunno his name yet, but I've got his number—collars me in the buildin' w'en I was waitin' for 'r to come out agin, an' that's all there is to it; so help me, Shaughnessy."

Now, as it happened, Rat's story fitted in very well indeed with Shaughnessy's understanding, although he was a little surprised to think that anybody had believed it worth while to have Jess shadowed. But, being thoroughly a crooked character himself, he regarded every other person as the same, and there seemed to be wheels within wheels working in the present affair, which were revolving in opposite directions all the time. He believed, therefore, that Rat had told him part of the truth.

He reached out and laid his hand reassuringly upon Rat's shoulder.

"That's all right, kid; only you've got to give up the name of the man who told you to do all that."

"Say, Shaughnessy, I can't. I've plumb forgot it—honest I have."

"I guess you mean by that that you're more afraid of him than you are of me. Ain't that right, Rat?"

"I ain't afraid uh nobody, I ain't," was the explosive reply.

Shaughnessy, for some reason, was satisfied. And it was his own egotism that satisfied him. He had suddenly come to the belief that it was Crewe who had told Rat to watch Jess, because Crewe had believed that the eighty-one thousand five hundred dollars was hidden somewhere in Jess's flat. And Crewe would have sent Rat to watch her only for the purpose of entering that flat and searching it when Jess was absent. Shaughnessy no longer thought that it was Crewe who had

14259 B

entered it the preceding night and stolen the weights.

Succeeding circumstances had worked in very well with this idea, for had not Crewe later appeared at the flat and walked into it without ringing?

Believing that Crewe would work with the same methods that he would employ himself, Shaughnessy fell into the error of supposing that Crewe had sent Rat to shadow Jess only because the absence of the boy from the street in front of the house would inform him that Jess had gone out.

"Let the kid go, Harper," he said to the new man. "I guess this is none of our affairs;" and Rat, with a wide grin on his face, lost no time in escaping from the stone building that he hated. He congratulated himself upon the wisdom of the tale he had made up out of whole cloth and told so glibly, understanding not at all how thoroughly it had served to convince Shaughnessy in regard to two of that officer's mistaken theories.

Later, Shaughnessy and Holderness went out together on their regular rounds. But Shaughnessy complained of a severe headache and a feeling of nausea and dizziness; and he did that by way of anticipating an excuse to leave Holderness when the hour should come that would enable him to make use of the two keys the locksmith had made for him.

For Shaughnessy was determined to enter Moreau's studio that night.

CHAPTER XIII

SHANNON'S GHOST

Two o'clock in the morning is the accepted hour for burglaries.

It was a stoop-shouldered, apparently narrow-chested, and sickly individual who, shortly after that hour, admitted himself stealthily at one of the doors of the tall building where Moreau had his studio, using a key that had been made for him by a locksmith on First Avenue. He was a few minutes late in passing inside, because he had waited in the shadow of a doorway opposite until he was assured that nobody was near to observe his act.

He used the door that opened upon the "other" street —that one through which Moreau passed when he chose to "disappear."

The building was tall and narrow and long, extending through the block. It was fire-proof, and there was no night-watchman or night elevator service, nor were there lights in the corridors until the intruder, weary from the effort of his long climb, found and snapped off one that glowed from a single bulb on the top floor.

To him that one incandescent was sufficient proof that Moreau was within the studio. The bright light of it shone full upon the man's face for one instant before he extinguished it. The glare of it revealed—as impressions behind the footlights at a theater are revealed—hollow cheeks and sunken eyes glowing brightly in darkened depths, unkempt hair and soiled linen and misshapen,

wrinkled clothing that would have been in fairly good condition but for the need of pressing—clothing less worn, but otherwise exactly like that which had covered the dead Shannon when they found him.

If the conductor of that twelve-forty train out of New York three days ago who collected the fare from Shannon between Monterey and the next station beyond could have glimpsed this man when he snapped off that light, he would have pronounced him the same person—not aware that the man who had paid his fare that day was supposed to be dead; or, if he had been aware of it, he might reasonably have been startled.

Shannon's ghost it was—the real Shannon—in other words, Brian O'Shaughnessy Shannon, for whom the dead one had suffered and wasted his life and gone to prison—and died; Shannon, the shadow, the wise guy, the double-crosser, the discoverer of that forgotten *Herald* and its contents; who had entered a car of that train as G. Mortimer Branton left it at the opposite end; who had passed behind the uniformed policeman and dodged his own side partner, Holderness, in passing through the station from the Occidental Express to the street that day.

It was the same Shannon who had opened the white envelope in the locked room and found the money, and who had said to his own reflection in the cracked mirror: "You're dead. Good-by, Shannon. We part here."

But, all the same, this man who had stood for an instant beneath the glare of the light was Shaughnessy; and if Moreau, or Crewe, or Holderness had seen him then, they would have recognized him, notwithstanding the faintly purple pigment that hollowed his cheeks and sunk his eyes, and in spite of the stain that discolored his teeth and blocked out three of them, and the wig of

unkempt, reddish hair that was several shades lighter than his own close-cropped thatch.

But Shaughnessy could not commit burglary in his plain-clothes attire, which was as pronounced in its individuality as a brass-buttoned uniform, any more than a Berry Wall could have gone to his breakfast at ten in the morning, in a dress suit.

He waited after he had turned off the light in the corridor. His rubber-soled shoes gave forth no sound when he advanced to the door that drew him as a magnet attracts steel. The key did not grate when he pushed it slowly into the socket, nor the hinges creak when he passed inside and closed the door silently behind him.

He stood for a long time just inside the door, listening —and heard nothing but the noises of the street outside. He had no need of the electric flash he had provided. The large, slanting studio window and the sky-glow of the city afforded enough. He would have preferred less, and to have made use of the flash.

The easels with their canvases resting against them loomed dismally in shadowy shapes, ghostlike. He could see undefined outlines upon them, suggestive of human presence—and he had not the least doubt that there were human presences near him in one or two of the three adjoining rooms, for there was a dressing-room for models, a bedroom for the artist, and a useless kitchen attached to the studio.

He had gone there after the money; but it was not of the money he thought while he stood so still, listening. Insane jealousy excited him more than cupidity in that interval.

Presently he glided forward to a door and passed into the dressing-room. The flash-light which he had to employ then, searched the length and breadth of it and revealed only an array of hooks heavy with costumes,

some chairs, a table, and a couch upon which he recognized the robes and cloud-drapery that Jess had worn while posing as Juno.

He stiffened for an instant when he saw that, then returned to the studio and stepped across the unguarded threshold of the bedroom. This time he held a weapon in his right hand, the light in his left one. But the room was as deserted as that other one, and there was no unusual sign of recent tenantry save in a pair of long kid gloves upon the dresser, which he picked up and smelled of, and recognized as the property of Jess.

Scowling, he thrust them into one of his pockets. He could not know that Jess had not been inside the studio since she came away from it after posing for the artist's Juno.

Instantly he became the burglar again—and he knew the trade. He snapped on the electric lights as he worked, knowing that there would be little or no danger that it would be noticed from the street below.

Within a few moments there was not a nook or cranny, depository or hiding-place, within that room that he had not searched with a thoroughness that might well have amazed the owner.

He returned to the dressing-room and served its interior in the same manner. He sought the little kitchen, and, figuratively, turned it wrong side out. He returned to the studio-room and searched there, overturning vases or peering into them, looking beneath cushions or prodding them with a long needle, half rolling the rugs to seek under them, emptying portfolios, opening the covers of books and holding them upside down for things to fall from them if things were there to fall, peeking into the clocks, and under the bric-à-brac, and behind pictures, and into every conceivable place where

a package that measured 7⅜ by 3⅛ by ⅜ inches might have been contained, rolled or flat.

Desks, tables, chairs, couches did not escape him—and he picked up and laid aside to carry away with him many articles of value. But he did not find what he sought.

Thus far he had paid no attention to the easels. They had suggested no promise, and he had barely noticed them. There were five in the room, three with the fronts toward the wall, and he seized the one within his reach and wheeled it around. They were pedestal easels, with one drawer in the base of each of them.

His own likeness confronted him, and for a moment he was panic-stricken. Then he dashed his fist through it, and tore it from the stretcher, and stamped upon it.

The second easel disclosed a counterpart of himself as he appeared at that moment in his Shannon make-up, and he staggered away from it, afraid. And then he turned about and fled from the studio, slamming the door after him, and leaving all the electric lights aglow in the room behind him.

Two figures emerged from the shadows in the corridor when Shaughnessy fled down the stairway. One of them hung back and was dragged along by the other, who clung to his wrist.

"Ghosts don't git scared like that, themselves, Rat—take it from me. You purty near had me goin', too, with your whimperin' an' cryin' an' crossin' yourself ever since you saw him standin' under that light. It almost got my goat, too. I'm free to acknowledge that, Rat. I ain't no church-warden that's used to 'em. Ghosts ain't in my line any more'n they're in your'n. But I could see there was a diff'rence, an' so could you. Besides, dead men don't use keys to git into doors; they

jest nacherly fades through 'em. Come on, now, an' brace up, 'r I'll hand you one."

"Whatchu goin' to do?" Rat asked recovering somewhat from his recent fright.

"We'll tackle our own job first, now 't he's outa the way. After that, if there's time, we'll take a squint into that other joint."

"Say, was that Shaughnessy?"

"Sure, Mike! An' mebby I won't put it all over him the next time he gits fresh with me! You watch me."

"What do you s'pose got his everlastin' goat that way, Faber?"

"Why, to my way uh thinkin', there ain't but one thing that could 'a' done that, Rat. I guess he had to hurt somebody in there so's to make a getaway; an' like's nót, since he done for the real Shannon—'cause that's the size of this business—he's lost his nerve. Anyhow, I'm goin' to find out as soon as I've got what I came here to get."

"Do you mean that you s'pose he's killed somebody in there?"

"Looks like it to me, Rat."

"Who?"

"Likely the guy whose name's on the door."

Faber had unlimbered his tools while talking, and he was as expeditious about the use of them as when he had jimmied the door of Jess's flat.

"You wait," he said to Rat, and passed inside. Gone but a moment, he returned with a roll of canvas beneath his arm, which he passed into the keeping of the youth. "Hold that," he said, "and don't you lose it. It ain't nothin' but a woman's picture, but I'm to git well paid for it, all the same, providin' I don't take nothin' else outa the place where I gets it."

He passed down the hall and stopped before the door

of Moreau's studio. Again he made careful selection from among his tools.

"Whatchu goin' in there for?" Rat demanded.

"Evidence, you gink. I wanta know what Shaughnessy's done in there, that's why; an' the next time he gits uppish I'll put one across to him that'll make him duck for cover, I will. I always thought he was a crook. There you are. These here doors are some solid, Rat. Gee! but it's light in here. You look around you while I search the other rooms. There ain't no stiff in this one."

Rat was staring at the drawing that had so frightened Shaughnessy, and paid no heed to Faber, who darted toward the other rooms; and seeing it, Rat understood, for he was shrewd beyond his years. He saw in it the same thing that Moreau had discovered when he made it—the vague likeness to Shaughnessy.

Then Rat pieced together the several torn fragments of the drawing that Shaughnessy had destroyed, recognizing instantly the unmistakable likeness of the detective, and he uttered a low whistle of astonishment, sitting on the floor and leaning against the square standard of the easel, to think. It rolled away from him; and, as if the violence of Shaughnessy when he attacked it had broken it, the whole thing fell apart and cluttered to the floor around the youth, littering him with dust and fugitive sketches and what-not that the single drawer in the pedestal disgorged.

He put the four pieces of the torn portrait of Shaughnessy one upon another to take them away with him, which some instinct bade him to do. A rough sketch of a pretty face caught his eye, and he added it to the pile. He was young enough so that pictured faces appealed to him, and he seized upon the lot that had fallen from the broken drawer, and rolled the whole together.

He was on his feet, with the roll under his arm, when Faber returned, and they spied at the same time the articles of value that Shaughnessy had collected.

Faber gathered them in.

"We'll whack up even on this, Rat," he said. "There ain't no dead man in here, and I give it up what it was that scared— Hello!" He slapped his knee. "That picture's what done it."

"There was a picture of Shaugn himself on that thing that's busted," said Rat. "He tore it up, but I've got it here." He tapped the roll under his arm.

"For the love of Mike, look here!" Faber exclaimed. He had turned the third easel, and disclosed the sketch of Crewe that Jess had made. "What'r' we up against, anyhow, kid? Crewe and Shaughnessy and Shannon and— Look over there, son! If that ain't the face of Shannon's Jess on that canvas, I'll eat it. Say, here's me for the thick covers. This here place ain't healthy."

He darted from the room with agility born of long practice in expert getaways, and Rat followed after, also badly frightened by that glimpse of the picture of Crewe; for Rat feared Crewe more than he did the law or prison-bars.

They ran down eight of the stairways, and were approaching the top of the last one when Faber halted, seized Rat, clapped a hand over the lad's mouth, and drew him hastily into the deeper darkness of the embrasure of a near-by doorway.

They stood without breathing while a *pat-pat-pat* of softly falling footsteps ascended the stairs, passed around the elevator shaft, and mounted the next ones. Nor did they venture to move away for a long time after that. Then they glided down the last stairway and out of the building, parting, and taking opposite directions the instant the door was passed.

Within the building a man mounted swiftly to the tenth floor, breathing laboriously by the time he arrived there. And outside of it three men, two of them in uniform, the third in civilian's dress, crossed the street and approached that entrance which neither Shaughnessy nor Faber and Rat had used that night. The civilian admitted them with a key. He led them to the elevator, stepped inside, and switched on the electric current which operated it.

Above them, on the tenth floor, the lone man, breathless from climbing, had found the door of Moreau's studio wide open, with the light streaming through into the hall, and he had plunged forward, weapon in hand, to kill.

For the man was Shaughnessy in different clothing and without the disguise—Shaughnessy returned to take away those drawings and destroy them, and Shaughnessy's thought was that Moreau had returned, or had been hiding during that first visit to the studio, and that Jess was probably with him.

Inside the door, he stopped. A glance as he passed it told him that it had been jimmied. The broken easel, the sketches and papers scattered over the floor amid the rest of the confusion, and the fact that the picture of himself was missing, next impressed him.

Utter amazement was upon him at what he saw, and he ran through the studio toward the other rooms, weapon in hand, as the elevator bearing the civilian and the two police officers arrived at that floor and stopped.

CHAPTER XIV

A DETECTIVE'S STRATAGEM

"It looks as if a cyclone had struck it," was the comment made by Moreau when he stepped inside of his own studio. "The burglar has gone, officer. We arrived here too— Why, hello! What are *you* doing here?"

Shaughnessy had appeared upon the threshold between the bedroom and the studio. And the man was Shaughnessy the operative, not Shaughnessy the ghost of Shannon. He nodded curtly to the artist.

Both of the policemen knew him and saluted.

"I guess you must smell 'em out, lieutenant," one of the officers remarked. "This gentleman comes to me on post, and he says he seen a light in his studio window when it hadn't oughter be there; and I calls to Thompson, who ain't far off, and up we comes, slick as you please, and finds you here before us."

"I saw no light, but I did see, or thought I saw, two shadows running away from the Blank Street door. Then I found a key in the lock of the door, and, as the shadows had flitted, I came inside to investigate. I walked up the stairs, and kept coming till I found this. I don't believe I was in this room five minutes ahead of you, Sweeney."

"Were there two men here?" Moreau asked.

"Yes. Look! Both of them wore sneakers, and both of them managed to step on that pastel-dust, which must have fallen out of the drawer of that easel when it was knocked over. See?"

They did see. It was true. Two footprints of noticeably different sizes were plainly impressed side by side upon the patch of powdered blue chalk that had fallen with so many other things from the drawer of the broken easel. The corrugated marks of the rubber-soled sneakers were plainly in evidence, and Lieutenant Shaughnessy had been quick to take advantage of the fact.

"I met Officer Compton outside just a few minutes ago, Sweeney. He is your roundsman, isn't he?" Shaughnessy added by way of a clincher. And then, without awaiting a reply, he wheeled upon Moreau. "And I would like to ask you, sir, how that picture happens to be here?" He pointed a finger at the Shannon picture. "And that one?" He pointed toward the sketch of Crewe.

Moreau smiled. Instead of replying directly, he said:

"There was still another which should be here and is not. Those? Oh, I made a sketch of that fellow Shannon at the morgue, and I fell to wondering what he might have looked like in good health—so I made that one. Rather good, don't you think? And that one? I don't know that chap. A friend of mine made that one. She called him Crewe, I think, or something like that."

"*She* did? Who was it?" Shaughnessy's eyes narrowed, and he fixed them without expression upon Moreau.

"A Miss Stacey, who poses for me. That is her face up there in that picture I've just begun. There isn't much done to it as yet, but it's a good likeness of her already."

"Where could I find Miss Stacey, Mr. Moreau? I'd like to ask her about that picture of Crewe she made."

"Why, you know her. She was here the last time you

were in this studio. You told me, don't you remember, that she used to be called—"

"Yes. I remember. Never mind that. Where can I find her—*now?*"

"She's in bed at her home, most likely. It's four o'clock nearly, and it's getting daylight." He gave a bill to Sweeney. "Here is something for you and Thompson to put in the poor-box next Sunday," he said; "and I won't keep you any longer. You won't mind walking down? How about you, Mr. Shaughnessy?"

"I'll stay—for a further talk with you, Mr. Moreau."

For just an instant there was a flutter of doubt in the artist's eyes as to the wisdom—or convenience—of Shaughnessy's remaining after the others had gone. But it disappeared as quickly as it came, and he nodded and passed into one of the adjoining rooms while the two uniformed policemen were saluting and taking their departure. He had returned to the doorway and stood upon the threshold of it when Shaughnessy wheeled to confront him.

"Where's Jess?" he asked.

"My dear fellow! How in the world should I know where she is, at this hour?"

"You do know—and I want to know."

Moreau shrugged his shoulders in a gesture which might have been translated to mean almost anything. It seemed to enrage Shaughnessy, for he came a step nearer, a black frown upon his face.

"Things have come pretty near to a show-down between you and me, Mr. Birge Moreau," he said incisively. "We're alone, and I don't think we're likely to be disturbed, and so we might just as well have it now. Who the hell are you, anyhow?"

He waited for a reply, and when none came, and

when Moreau did not change his attitude of respectful and half-amused attention, he went on:

"That wasn't any accident, as you pretended, getting Jess here to pose as your model. That call you made upon her, when you left your card for her to show to me, was a frame-up, pure and simple. You and Jess are older acquaintances than that. Where is she, I say? She came here to you a little before five o'clock last night, and you knew she was coming, because she telephoned. When you've answered me that question I'll ask you some others that'll be harder still. But I want that one answered first. Where is she—right now?"

"Oh, I will answer the question with perfect directness, if that is what you want, Shaughnessy," Moreau replied with the trace of a smile about the corners of his mouth. "I don't know where she is."

"You lie."

All the lassitude and ease of position left Birge Moreau with the suddenness of a flash of light, and he had taken a stride forward and shot out his right arm before there was the slightest opportunity for Shaughnessy to anticipate the act.

An observer, had there been one, would have said that Moreau had invited the word that had impelled the attack, and that his manner had been of studious purpose to throw the other off his guard. It is certain that the clenched fist of the artist caught Shaughnessy upon the neck under his chin before the latter could raise his own hands, or otherwise avoid the blow.

And there was power behind it.

The big operative went to the floor in a crumpled heap, not stunned, but sick—with every ounce of resistance gone from him by that shock to his whole nervous system. He could no more have risen to his own defense after that blow, than he had anticipated it, or its para-

lyzing effect. Yet he remained conscious, and his eyes rolled in his head while he floundered upon the floor in an effort to reach for the weapon that he carried in his pocket.

But Moreau, suddenly become a man of swift action, thrust a hand into one of the side pockets of Shaughnessy's coat and drew out the handcuffs which every plain-clothes man carries with him, and he snapped them upon Shaughnessy's wrists with the ease and assuredness that the operative himself might have employed had the conditions been reversed. Then, with surprising strength, he assisted Shaughnessy to his feet, and grasping him by the coat beneath his arms, walked the as yet partly helpless man in front of him across the studio and through the open doorway to the elevator shaft.

Shaughnessy was beginning to swear, but Moreau seemed not to hear. His calm and handsome features had settled into a hardness of expression that was foreign to them. He guided his captive into the cage, stepped in after him, threw on the lever, and they shot downward.

At the bottom of the shaft he guided Shaughnessy in the same manner toward the Blank Street door, pulled it open, shoved the operative into the street and closed it again—and then he twisted a small brass knob between his thumb and fingers, thus shooting an extra bolt into commission and rendering a key to that door useless.

And he did it all without uttering one word in response to the profane protests of the conquered man whose vocabulary powers had been restored much more rapidly than his vitality. Then he returned to the elevator and to his studio on the tenth floor.

Shaughnessy found himself upon the street at dawn

with his hands locked together in front of him by his own handcuffs, with a deadly faintness not unlike nausea biting at his vitals, and with the overwhelming sense of his own defeat—and perhaps disaster as well—enraging every impulse within him to madness. For suddenly he was beset by actual terror of the man who had overcome him so easily.

Shaughnessy was afraid.

He picked up a stray newspaper from the gutter, and worked it into position over his manacled hands until it covered them from sight.

The gray of dawn was over the city. Milk wagons and butcher carts rattled and thumped within his hearing as he started away, walking uncertainly because the effect of that terrific blow against his Adam's apple was still upon him.

But he recovered as he went forward, so that soon he was enabled to hurry, passing block after block, and crossing many streets until he arrived at a flat-house where he knew the vestibule door was never locked, and where he raised his manacled hands to an electric button and held it beneath the continued pressure of one of his thumbs until the clicking of a latch released the inner door.

He stumbled up two flights of stairs to be confronted by Holderness, whose face was like a thundercloud because he had only just gone to bed and to sleep when the bell awakened him. But Shaughnessy paid no heed. He thrust out his manacled hands.

"Unlock 'em," he ordered. "Then get into your clothes and come with me. . . . Oh! Them? They weren't working right. I was trying them and snapped them on myself. Then I couldn't get at my key. Thanks." He dropped the handcuffs into his pocket. "Come on. Get your things on and go with me."

"Like hell I will!" Holderness replied hotly. "It's daylight. Where the—"

"You know who Birge Moreau is—the artist? It was out at his place where Shannon got that wad. Well, his studio was busted open last night. It was Faber's work, too, or I'm a Dutchman. Anyhow I can prove it on him—him and his helper too. There'll be marks of blue chalk on the soles of their sneakers. I want you to—"

"Look here, Shaugn, I don't care what happened, or what's likely to happen; I ain't goin' to dress an' go out now for you 'r any other guy on earth! And what's more, I've kinda come to the conclusion that you've been havin' bad dreams about that same wad, and I wanta tell you right here that you've played the wrong man for a sucker when you played me. Me an' Marline, an' Baxter have been doin' a little trailin' on our own accounts, an' if this here proposition of yours don't pan out something substantial mighty sudden, there's goin' to be something doing down at headquarters. You told Branton and the others out there at Monterey that you was in the station when Shannon went through it from the Occidental, when you know mighty well that it was *me* who was there, an' that *I didn't see him come through*, 'cause if I had seen him I'd have nailed him. So if you know he did come through, it was because you was on the train with him; and if you was on the train with him, *you got the wad away from him—and if you ever got your fingers onto that bunch of money you've got it now. . . .* You'd better come across, Shaughnessy, 'cause if you don't, the rest of us are goin' to know why. We're beginnin' to think that Shadow Shannon wasn't in this thing at all—and we're beginnin' to guess purty near to who was. And this handcuff business don't wash clean, either. You'd better play such things on the goats an' not try 'em on a cop that's been

poundin' pavements for fourteen years. The inspector will be wantin' to ask you a lot of questions to-night, Shaughnessy, if you don't see us first."

Holderness went inside of his flat and slammed the door after him. He left Shaughnessy standing upon the landing, and he could hear a vile epithet thrown at him by his side-partner.

And Shaughnessy continued to hurl profanity and interlarded epithets behind him all the way to the street, where he paused for a moment to gaze haggardly up and down the thoroughfare, moistening his dried lips with his tongue, and otherwise betraying extreme nervous tension.

It had been a bad night for Shaughnessy, and he was fast getting into a mood that was desperate.

"Anyhow, I'll nail Faber, and see what comes of it. And I'll make Crewe talk, too, if I have to kill him to do it," he told himself as he started away.

CHAPTER XV

FABER'S FINISH

FABER was out of bed the instant the rap sounded against his door. But he made not a sound. He was fully dressed, too, for he had thrown himself upon the bed without removing an article of his clothing. Rat, who had been asleep on the floor, leaped to his feet, darted to the open window, and was outside and running down the fire-escape before the second and more peremptory summons began.

Faber thought quickly between those two raps at his door. Neither burglars' tools, nor spoils of burglary, were in that room. Rat had gone—and he did not know that Rat had departed so quickly that he had left his rubber sneakers behind him. Rat had not yet been thoroughly weaned from the barefoot age, and had taken his shoes off when he laid down.

"Who's there?" Faber asked cautiously.

"Shaughnessy—and you open up mighty quick."

Faber shot back two bolts, then stepped backward to the bed and seated himself upon the edge of it with his right hand under the corner of the pillow. There was a strange light in his eyes, and none of the fear that Shaughnessy had expected to see. He spoke before Shaughnessy's blustering announcement could be made.

"You got there a little too soon, didn't you?" he said coolly. "Though what in thunder you went back after, when you had gone and changed your clothes, an' washed the paint off'n your face, an' pulled off that Shannon

wig, is more'n I know. Good mawnin', Mister Shannon-the-shadow. I hope I see you quite well this hot mawnin'," he concluded with indescribable insolence.

Shaughnessy stood aghast and speechless for once.

Faber's words and manner gave him a worse shock than Moreau's fist against his jugular had done. He read the entire circumstance correctly upon the instant. He saw it all exactly as it had happened. Coming so soon after his suddenly acquired terror of Moreau and the veiled accusations of Holderness, it acted upon him as a virus of utter madness. His gun was in his hand, held at his hip, but if he pressed upon the trigger the noise of it would be too great. Yet he knew that Faber's right hand held another weapon concealed under the pillow, and that Faber would not hesitate to make use of it.

So Shaughnessy did a surprisingly agile thing. He threw his own weapon, with a sudden uplift of his hand, and the gun struck Faber squarely upon the temple before he could lift his hand, and Faber sagged forward and slipped from the edge of the bed to the floor, pulling the gun he had been clutching, with him.

Shaughnessy closed the door, shot the two bolts into place, and without so much as a second glance at Faber, climbed through the window to the fire-escape that Rat had used—and as he turned around to descend he saw Rat's sneakers on the bare floor, soles upward, one of them stained with the blue mark of the artist's pastel crayon.

"Rat was there, too, and I've got to get him," was Shaughnessy's thought when he had succeeded in reaching the street through the lower hall of the tenement without being seen. He knew that other tenants of the house might have heard Faber's fall, but it was a question whether they would investigate. It was generally safer to say that they had heard nothing, for the house

of detention for witnesses is worse than a prison, and is more shunned by the underworld.

He understood also that Rat had been asleep on the floor when he had rapped at the door, and that he had gone down that fire-escape like a squirrel, and had sought the nearest cover, like the rat whose namesake he was. That nearest cover would be Crewe's, Shaughnessy believed.

Had Shaughnessy been honest he would have made a very great detective—although possibly it was his dishonesty which had given him an understanding of motives which otherwise he might have lacked.

Crewe's place was not far away, and Shaughnessy lost no time. He knew that it was ordinarily "dead" at that hour in the morning; but he banged upon the door nevertheless, although poor Terry Shannon had often told him of another method of getting inside when the place was locked. But Shaughnessy preferred not to make use of it just then.

Terry had not known the secret of that hollow sign over the door, and so Shaughnessy did not know that while he was rapping the second time, the slide in the bottom of it was drawn back, and presently replaced—nor did he suspect that Crewe had been inside the house only a short time himself, and was, therefore, very much on the alert when he arrived.

"We can't open till six nowadays, Shaugn," Crewe remarked genially as he admitted his early caller; "but I guess I can mix you one if you want it."

"How long have you been up?" Shaughnessy demanded, striding inside. His mood was ugly. He was dangerous.

"Me? I haven't been to bed, Shaugn," Crewe laughed.

"Where have you been?"

"Sitting in a poker game over in Brooklyn."

Crewe passed behind the bar and set out bottles and glasses, but even he was amazed at the size of the drink which Shaughnessy poured out and gulped at a swallow, instantly filling the glass a second time and downing that one, too.

"I want Rat," he said shortly. "I know he's here, and I want him."

"Yes—he's here all right. He just came in when I did."

"Call him. I want him."

"I'm sorry, Shaughnessy; but you can't have him."

"Why not, I'd like to know?"

"Well, that reason is enough. Just because you can't."

As had happened once before in the relations of these two, there was a period while they gazed firmly into each other's eyes. But this time neither one of them wavered, and the duel was nothing better than a draw.

"Rat was out last night, Crewe, and I've got a hunch that you sent him. However that may be, he was there, and he was with Faber. I'm going around to get Faber presently; but I thought I'd come here first, after Rat, because I was sure that this would be the place where he'd hunt cover."

"How do you know all this, Shaughnessy?"

"Because I've been there where they broke in. I saw them making their getaway. Up above I recognized Faber's work. He might as well have written his name on the door-jamb. Inside they'd spilled some chalk and stepped into it, and one of the footmarks was made by a kid. Rat would be the only kid that Faber would take with him on such a job—and there you are. So now I want him, and what's more, I'm going to get him."

Crewe turned leisurely toward the clock that ticked above the end of the bar. Then he replied:

"All right, get him—only I should think that he'd be almost a mile away by this time. He lit out through the hall-door while you was coming in at that one. You see, I saw you coming, and Rat had already told me—" He stopped.

"What had he told you?"

"The same thing that I threw at you at five o'clock yesterday afternoon, mister man—that about Shannon-the-shadow—and that you've already been to Faber's."

He bent forward half across the bar and added harshly almost in Shaughnessy's face:

"And that you had gutted Moreau's studio long before he and Faber got there. You'd better take a seat in the back row, Shaughnessy, for you're the crookedest crook that ever picked a pocket."

CHAPTER XVI

DRIVEN TO DESPERATION

RAT, escaping from Crewe's, sought shelter in a retreat that was known only to himself beneath a dock on the river-front, where he kept a store of provisions and water for just such an occasion.

Faber in his own room moved a finger, then a hand and arm, and groaned, and tried to raise himself from the floor ten minutes after Shaughnessy fled down the fire-escape. He was dazed and helpless; but he had strength enough to pound upon the floor, and those who heard him called a policeman off the street, who was compelled to break in the door to get to him. Faber was unconscious again when found, and an ambulance took him away. The precinct detective, who arrived before the ambulance had gone, removed the gun from Faber's clenched fingers—he had used it to pound upon the floor—picked up Rat's sneakers, nodded his head sagely, and remarked to the uniformed policeman:

"These look as if they'd about fit Rat, and Rat was a pet of Faber's. They was busy last night, more'n likely, and couldn't agree afterward; so Rat must 'a' black-jacked him while he was reachin' for his gun. See that chalk on this right sneaker of Rat's? And that on the left one of Faber's? They didn't get that in the street. I guess I'll put out the net for Rat. He done it, all right."

At Crewe's, Shaughnessy glared across the bar at the blemished face that confronted him. He tried to pull his gun, and found that he could not move a muscle to do it. He was afraid—literally and wholly afraid of the man behind the bar.

He turned unsteadily away toward the door, opened it, passed out, did not close it, returned, swallowed hard, reapproached the end of the bar behind which Crewe waited without speaking, tried to smile cunningly, and only succeeded in making a grimace, and said in a voice that was husky with mixed emotions:

"Give me another drink, Crewe. I've got something to say to you."

Crewe put out bottle and glasses without replying. Shaughnessy was wetting his lips with his tongue, thinking of what he would say to this man. He decided:

"You've got me dead to rights, Crewe. Well, I've got that money. I've had it all the time. It's all there where I've hid it away, except fifteen hundred of it which I've been using. If you'll cry quits and meet me when and where I'll say, I'll turn over all of the tens and half of the rest to you. How about it?"

"You're on," was the laconic reply.

Shaughnessy moved away from the bar after helping himself to another drink. His assurance was returning. His fertile brain had thought of a way out of all his difficulties at one stroke.

"I'll telephone you at five where to meet me at eight or nine to-night," he said from the doorway, and was gone.

Crewe put away the bottle and glasses, and called to Christy to open up. Then he went out.

Holderness, snoring in his flat, was roused from sleep a second time by his side partner. He could see by the

expression of Shaughnessy's face that "something was doing," so he waited in silence for the other to speak.

"There isn't time to tell it all to you, Holdy," Shaughnessy said. "I did have that money, only Crewe got it away from me. Then Jess—no matter how—got it away from him. Now he's thrown a scare into her that's got her goat for fair, and she has made a proposition to him through me to turn fifty thousand of it back to him to-night at half past eight. We keep the rest. But the thing that I came here to say is that there's no reason why we can't keep it all if you and Marline and Baxter will all be together at that place of meeting and let me hide you away before Crewe gets there. How about it?"

"It sounds good if the meetin'-place is all right."

"You leave that to me. I fixed that. I've got a friend named Bill Lampton. He's captain of a barge. She's tied up at the foot of Manders Street, to that old rotten dock that's been condemned. The cabin of that barge is the place. You be there and have the others with you not later than eight. I'll plan all the rest. Is it a go?"

"Yes."

Shaughnessy visited an electrical-supply store after he left Holderness. Thence he called upon a friend who was an excavation contractor, and when he came away he brought six sticks of dynamite with him. His next call after that was at the barge Sally Ann at the foot of Manders Street, and the bestowal of a new twenty-dollar bill sent Captain Lampton forthwith on a fool's errand to Philadelphia.

After the captain had gone, Shaughnessy was busily employed more than an hour in the proper disposal, for his purposes, of the dynamite and the electric battery and wire and fulminating-caps he had taken there with

him. The wire he led ashore and beneath the old dock that had been condemned, and he connected the wires with the battery, and hid the latter under some rubbish beneath the planking of the dock.

Then he went away to seek Jess, for he intended that she should be there also. It was their lives or his, then.

But a pair of shrewd bright eyes had seen his approach, and had watched furtively every move he had made since then. And when he had gone Rat crept from his hiding-place and, with a startled glance behind him, fled away from the spot like a frightened rabbit. He ran straight to Crewe's, too, to tell him all about it; but Crewe had gone away, and Christy didn't know when he would return.

Then, that precinct detective who had found Faber, came in and collared Rat while he stood talking to Christy, charging him openly with the murder of Faber.

Outside, in the street, Rat jerked away from the grasp of the precinct detective and ran; and, although he was pursued and hundreds tried to stop him, he was agile and resourceful, and he escaped. But he was desperate, and he was frightened; and, more than all, *he did not want to be searched just then*, and he ran on and on, repeating to himself over and over again: "Maybe he'll save me if I take it back to him. Maybe he'll save me if I take it back to him." And he did not stop running until he was inside the elevator of the building he had visited in company with Faber the preceding night.

He ran when he left the elevator at the tenth floor—and he ran plump into Shannon's Jess, who stood just inside the doorway of Moreau's studio. Rat's legs had carried him, running, more than three miles, and he fell to the floor in a heap, breathless and exhausted.

"Maybe you'll save me if I give it back to you," he

managed to gasp. "I didn't know I had it till I got down under the dock and found it in the bundle. An' that bull says I killed Faber when I didn't even know he was dead. Shaughnessy killed him if anybody did, 'cause he was there hammerin' on the door when I beat it over the smoke-ladder. And I thought if I'd bring it back you'd let me hide here where they'd never think of lookin' for me till they know the truth. . . . And there's dynamite in the boat that Shaughnessy put there, an' he's goin' to blow somebody to smithereens."

He pulled a package tied in brown paper from beneath his shirt, and sighed with relief when he dropped it into Moreau's outstretched hand. . . . Moreau unbound the package and exposed eighty thousand dollars of the missing money.

"We knew that you had it, Rat," he said. "This lady was just going out to try to find you, to ask you for it. Now tell me what you mean about the dynamite, for she has just found a written note at her flat, asking her to meet the writer of it at a certain boat to-night for a division of this same money."

It did not take Rat long to tell all he knew about the dynamite, and when he had finished Moreau put the money in his pocket and went out.

"Mr. Moreau has proved himself a good friend to us since yesterday, Rat; and he will do a lot for you, if you will let him," Jess said when they were alone. "And you're right about Shaughnessy. He's Shannon, the shadow, and I'm his wife. That one that died was his brother Terry, and he was never anything but a hopeless dope. So it was Shaughnessy who got the money and hid it. And I found where it was hid, and swiped it because he wasn't playing even with me. Then Crewe thought Shaughnessy had the money and came to my flat after it, and he found the receipted bill for the brass

weights, and he carried them away with him. And I had the money all the time; but I got scared of Shaughnessy, and so when I came here to pose for Mr. Moreau, I hid it under a lot of papers and chalk in the drawer in the bottom of that broken easel. And last night you carried it off with you without knowing it. . . . And to-day, when I found that note at the flat, from Shaughnessy, asking me to meet him, and knowing already that he was here last night, I made sure that he had it again, so I hikes up here to tell Mr. Moreau about it, and he hears me through and says right out that you've got it. Then you blew in and brought it. Faith, but it's funny! He says he knew I had it ever since he saw that letter I sent to—but you don't know what I'm talking about. Shut your mouth quick, Rat, or the top of your head will fall off."

The inspector in charge of the detective bureau received a package that was delivered to him within an hour of the time that Jess and Rat were exchanging confidences at the studio after Moreau left them there. It contained eighty thousand dollars in cash, and a concise, written statement of incidents and events beginning at the time of the loss of the eighty-one thousand five hundred dollars. It closed with this paragraph:

There is no doubt that Shaughnessy means to kill with the dynamite all who know his secret. He does not dream that I know it. But Holderness, Marline, Baxter, Crewe, and Jess are marked for victims. Faber is dead, and Rat would soon disappear. Holderness, Marline, and Baxter you must deal with as you see fit. There is nothing upon which Crewe could be held. Jess means to reform, and I believe should be given the chance.

And Rat brought back the money. Don't forget that. Jess says she will adopt him and make him keep straight. She said that before he brought back the money. You may return it to Mr. Branton and claim the reward and the

credit for the department. Of course I do not care to be known. B. M.

Shaughnessy could not be found, and so, officers especially detailed were sent to the boat at the foot of Manders Street to disconnect the wires and battery with the dynamite, and to wait there for him. Holderness, Marline, and Baxter were left uninformed of what was happening—but they must have received an underground warning from some quarter, because none of them went near the boat at the appointed time.

Crewe did.

He received his telephone message at five o'clock, and at half past eight he walked down the old dock and sprang aboard of the barge.

But even as he did so, Shaughnessy came running from the cabin, pursued by three central office men.

"Anyhow, I'll get *you!*" he yelled when he saw Crewe, and ran at the man, holding to the end of a short iron bar, which he flourished above his head.

But the unafraid attitude of Crewe must have awed Shaughnessy in that last desperate moment, for he half stopped his onward rush, then turned, and plunged headforemost into the water, and the three central office men did the same thing.

When they succeeded in fishing Shaughnessy from the river, and he realized that his twofold career as Shannon the shadow, and Shaughnessy the detective, was at an end, he showed the inherent weakness of his dual character by abjectly breaking down and weeping. Afterward he made a full confession, by which it was known that Terrence Shannon, who died, had never been a thief, but only a weakling. Nor was Jess ever Terrence Shannon's wife—but she and Shaughnessy had

succeeded through her pose as such, in thoroughly confusing the two identities.

When the three officers climbed out of the water and looked for Crewe, he had disappeared. And that night, probably with the full realization that there was nothing against him at headquarters that he need fear, he was behind his bar as usual, listening to the comments of his patrons upon the events of the day.

The day following, by special invitation, Jess and Rat occupied seats in the last car of the twelve-forty train for Monterey. But Moreau was not there to receive them. He remained in the city. Neither was Feltner, the valet, in evidence; for a little secret of Feltner's, that nobody but his master knew about, was that whenever he was in the city he occupied by direction of his master a blind room that adjoined the studio suite, and to which the mere moving of a switch would transfer the telephonic connection that carried Moreau's number in the directory.

CHAPTER XVII

BRANTON'S DAUGHTER

THE great G. Mortimer Branton had a daughter who was as good as she was beautiful and who devoted a great part of her life to going about among the poor and downtrodden of the city and in reaching out a helping and sustaining hand to those who had fallen, or were like to fall, by the way.

She did not call it charity; her whole idea was to assist those who needed a helpful word, or a wholesome thought, or an uplift to that instinct for right-doing which is the inherent quality of every human, no matter along what devious paths their footsteps may have been led.

It was upon one such occasion that Ethel Branton had come in contact with Shannon's Jess; and though she had done very little for the woman, and had said less, there had yet been qualities in the interchange of conversation during their meeting, which Jess had never forgotten—which she cherished in her memory as one of the bright spots upon her somewhat checkered career.

Ethel was not unlike other girls of her age and condition. She had been reared in the lap of luxury; she had never known a want that was not, or could not have been, fulfilled; and being by nature full of sentiment, she had, once in her life, while she was yet a schoolgirl with braids down her back, fancied herself in love.

The young chap who had been the object of that schoolgirl fancy of hers—it had never amounted to any-

thing approaching a passion—had realized only too well the advantages of social position, to say nothing of riches, which might accrue to him if he could ever aim so high as to make Ethel Branton his wife. And so he had used every means in his power, and every method he could employ, to foster the acquaintance with her, thus formed; nor had he ever permitted an opportunity to pass that offered him any chance of re-declaring his love for her. If he found it impossible to see her, he sent her letters, usually by messenger, and all couched in the same phrasings of undying devotion.

The strongest sentiment that Ethel Branton felt for him who had been the cause of the first—and, thus far, the only—romance in her life, may be defined as that sort of interest which has forever existed and, please God, always will exist, between past-classmates. She did feel concerned, in the abstract, about his well-being, his contentment, his prosperity; and she did implicitly accept as true his statements, oral and written, about himself and his career.

Thus it was that when she came out of the door of her home between two and half past two o'clock in the afternoon of one day not long after the happenings of the incidents that have just been described, she was not greatly surprised when a youth darted across the thoroughfare, put an envelope into her hand, and sped away; nor did it occur to her to decline to receive the message it contained.

She did not read it at once. She knew perfectly well who had sent it. She did not really want to read it at all; and she would have avoided accepting the delivery of it had it not been her inclination, always, not to inflict unnecessary pain.

But, she read the letter.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BEGINNING OF A CRIME

"You can save me. Nobody else can."

The words haunted her. The two brief sentences recurred constantly to her mind. She repeated them over and over and over again. The possibilities suggested by them possessed her.

Better, far better indeed, would it have been for Ethel Branton had she followed the first impulse that came to her when she recognized the handwriting on the envelope that was given to her by its messenger when she came down the steps from her father's palatial home. It had been to destroy the letter instantly and without reading it. Better—a thousand times better would it have been for her had she done that. But she did not.

Instead, she carried it tightly clenched in her right hand for several blocks while she walked slowly onward with bent head, pondering, deep in thought. And then she opened the envelope and read the letter. After that she read it again, and yet again; and then, while she stood at a corner, awaiting a Fifth Avenue bus, she tore it slowly, envelope and all, into tiny bits, and let the particles flutter downward into the gutter at her feet.

Over at the opposite side of the avenue a wizened-faced youth who was seated with dangling feet upon the park wall, watched her without interest, but curiously, nevertheless, because she was so very charming to look upon.

Then, when the bus drew up to the curb and stopped,

and she signaled for it to go on without her, and crossed the avenue directly toward him with quickened step, as if in response to a suddenly formed purpose, he grinned, dropped down from the wall, and a moment later seated himself upon the curbstone where she had been standing, and began to gather up the torn and scattered fragments of the mutilated letter.

"I ain't never seen no real love-letter, an' it's a cinch that this 'ere was a close cousin to one—if I c'n put it together 'n read it," he told himself. "Only, I aint quite onto that guy that gave it to her. Peter the Con don't belong to nobody in *her* class, an' he aint deliverin' messages for nobody that does, either. Not if I know the con—and I think I do."

In the mean time Ethel Branton hurried onward with constantly quickened steps, and the last two sentences, "You can save me. Nobody else can," said themselves to her over and over again.

"At least I will see him. I will hear what he has to say," she told herself when more than once her steps lagged and the impulse to avoid the meeting, rather than to seek it, returned to her.

The instinct of the youth on the wall had been correct. The destroyed communication had been a love-letter—but a crafty one. The writer had understood only too well the character of the girl who was to receive it.

It began abruptly and without any endearing terms. It read:

I have come to the fork of the road, Ethel. One of the forks leads to the top of a precipice over which I shall plunge into eternity; the other, if you will lead the way and hold the light, is the road to happiness and content and perfect peace. I have loved you all my life, as you well know, but never as now.

Since we were little kids my soul has cried out in despair for yours. But I shall not beseech you any more as I have done in the Past; that I promise you. If you will meet me to-day, as I have asked, I will utter no word of love which may offend. You have saved others, why not put out a hand to save me? Am I not worth it?

I know of a woman named Stacey—"Shannon's Jess" she was called in the underworld—whom you saved from perdition, and who swears by you, and calls you an angel because of what you have done for her. Surely I am as worthy as she was. Come to me, then, unless you have no care whether I be saved or lost, as soon as you have read this message.

I will be waiting—I shall wait until closing time to-night before I will give you up. You will find me near that great painting which we used to discuss, at the Museum of Art. Remember, when you have put aside this letter, perhaps destroyed it as you have done with others of mine, that you hold in the hollow of your hand this day a soul. Will you stretch out your hand and save it, or will you thrust it carelessly aside into utter and eternal misery? Come to me, if only for a moment. It is the last time I shall ask you for an interview. You can save me. Nobody else can.

There was no signature.

The writer of the letter was at the museum, waiting, when she arrived. He turned about, eagerly and quickly, and seized both of her hands in his; and he led her away, out of view of possibly prying eyes, to a remote spot where they might not be overheard. He was masterful in his manner and Ethel was startled.

Something whispered to her, even then in that first moment of their meeting, that she should not remain; that she should go away at once. Oh, if she had but heeded that premonition! But she listened to him; she permitted him to talk on, even when she knew that she ought not.

"My girl! My girl! Oh, but it is good to see you! Oh, but it is good to be near you again, Ethel!" he kept

saying over and over, while they sought that secluded spot away from the eyes and ears of others.

"Please stop," she interrupted him. "You promised in your letter that you would not say these things to me to-day. That is why I came—because you promised."

"You know that I can't help it," he replied sharply.

"But, you promised. That is why I came," she repeated.

"Yes, I promised." He seemed to try to contain himself—and to fail.

"You said that you were in great trouble, and that I could save you," she said.

"You can."

"Tell me how."

"How? Good God! can you ask me how? Love me. Marry me. Be my wife. Reach down your hand into the mire where I am wallowing, seize hold of me and lift me up out of it," he cried out, vehemently.

"But I cannot be your wife. You know that. It is utter folly even to speak of it."

"Why? Why is it folly, Ethel?"

"You know why. I would not marry you even if all things were right in your career. I could not, even if I loved you; and I do not love you. I do not even like you. You are bad. You are wicked. You do things that you ought not to do. You—"

"You loved me once," he interrupted her doggedly.

"No. Never. That is not so. As a child, when neither of us knew what love was, I used to tell you that I did; I used to promise that I would marry you some day. But we were little children then."

"You have cast me into the depths," he said. "I have asked you to save me, and you refuse. Nobody else can save me. To-day I shall end it all."

"Oh, I should not have come here to see you!" she

half cried out, and attempted to stop and turn about; but he led her onward, forcefully, yet with apparent gentleness.

And so they passed outside of the building and descended to the ground—and they were at the opposite side of the museum from where she had entered.

Near them, within half a dozen paces from where they paused again, a taxicab stood waiting. Ethel saw it without heeding it. A man lolled listlessly in the driver's seat. Another stood idly a few feet distant, with his back turned. She saw them, knew that they were there; that was all.

The man she had gone there to meet clandestinely drew her unresistingly nearer to the cab. If she thought about the act at all, it was that they would go on past it, turn the corner of the building—and that then she would leave him. Almost within reach of the taxi he stopped her again.

"Ethel," he said, "for the last time—and this is the last; the very last—will you save me? I love you. I want you. I must have you, or—or I am utterly lost from this moment. Ethel! Ethel! Won't you have pity on me?"

She trembled inside, and a great yearning to do something for him welled within her. She reached out impulsively and laid one hand against his arm. She addressed him by his name. She even put the word "dear" before it. "Try to do better; try to be good, for my sake," she pleaded.

"I will," he replied, speaking hoarsely. "But you must go. You must leave me. If you stay one minute longer, close to me, I will go mad with my love for you. Here!"

He turned her around. "Get into this cab. Quick! I will send you home—away from me—while yet there is

time. Get inside, Ethel. For your own sake, leave me!"

"No, no!" she exclaimed half resistingly. "I will return as I came. I will—"

"Get inside, Ethel. Get away from me now, quickly, while I am willing to let you go!" he interrupted.

Somehow she complied. For some reason she could not have explained, she put her foot upon the step and permitted herself to be assisted into the taxi. She seated herself. She turned to face him again, to say one more kind word before they should part finally, to this man who had plotted so deftly against her; and who, with all the skill of the fiend he was, had led her inch by inch to the point where she appeared to get into the cab willingly.

He stood just outside the door. He bent nearer to her as if to say a last word of parting. Ethel was facing him. Her back was toward the opposite door.

That door opened silently, and quickly. She did not hear it. She did not know that it did open, or that another man was there who sprang inside lightly, with the agility of a cat.

Those last words of kindness that she would have uttered to this man who had been her playmate in childhood, were not spoken. A cry of horror and of terror that rose to her lips found no outlet. A towel fell across her face. It covered her mouth, her nostrils, her eyes. It was pressed rudely against her. A strong hand held it so tightly over her face that she could not utter a sound. An arm encircled her around her shoulders, holding her helpless. She could not see; she could not cry out in her sudden terror; she could not breathe during that moment of horror; she could not struggle, because the arm and the hand that grasped her, held her powerless.

For one wild instant she thought that the man who

had besought her to save him would leap forward to her rescue. She was even conscious that he sprang into the cab. . . .

Then she heard the door slam shut. Then the other door also. Then his, *his* hands and arms seized and held her, too.

Then, only then, she understood.

The horror of it swept down upon her like a black cloud. This man was taking her away against her will. He had planned it. He had gone there, having induced her to meet him, just for that; just to steal her.

A thousand perils, a million horrors that might be in store for her, rushed upon her in that instant, even as the cab lurched forward with a sudden jolt; just as the full consciousness of her utter helplessness against those men overwhelmed her. Then—

Unconsciousness graciously overwhelmed her.

The taxicab wound its way in and out among other vehicles while it passed on to the avenue. There was nothing about it to indicate that the beginning of a great crime had already been committed and that the innocent-looking taxicab was bearing a pure and beautiful young woman bodily away toward the commission of unspeakably greater ones.

Thus did Ethel Branton disappear. Thus did she seem to step off of the earth into nothingness—just as many another like her has been borne away on the road to perdition, disgrace, and death.

CHAPTER XIX

A MAN NAMED CREWE—

SHANNON'S Jess—Miss Stacey, as she preferred to be addressed—stepped down from her pose as Juno for Birge Moreau, and crossed to the easy chair behind the screen to rest.

Moreau, with the handles of innumerable brushes held under his thumb through the hole in his palette, and with another one between his teeth, stepped backward, slowly, away from the canvas, viewing it critically under partly lowered lids to concentrate his gaze.

Jess, from her chair behind the screen, studied him as critically; and when at last he took his eyes from the unfinished painting and moved over nearer to her, she remarked, half lazily, but with a quizzical smile that brightened, in a wonderful way, her strong, handsome face:

"Do you know, Mr. Moreau, sometimes I think that maybe you are the greatest unsolved mystery of the twentieth century?—and that's no joke."

"Really?" he replied, smiling back at her and dropping upon a chair that faced hers, while he lighted a cigarette.

Then he leaned backward, crossed one leg over the other knee, and added perfunctorily: "How interesting. Mysteries are always attractive, and if you find me so —well, that's interesting, too."

"Aren't you curious about it?" she asked.

"Not particularly. Still, since we are on the subject—why?"

"Crewe," Jess replied briefly.

"Crewe?" he repeated after her, raising his eyebrows.

She nodded. "That man Crewe," she said. "None other."

"He is a saloonkeeper, isn't he—or something of the sort? I remember him, I think. Oh, yes. In association with that $81,500 that Branton lost while on his way out to the Fells, my country place." He was quizzing her, and she knew it. . . . But she half started to her feet, then relaxed upon the chair again.

"Say!" she exclaimed, "that reminds me of something else. Mr. Branton, the great—"

"Wait a moment, Miss Stacey, please. Let's find a period to one sentence before we begin another one. Just what do you mean by that reference to Crewe—and me?"

"Oh, nothing. It isn't worth mentioning. You're about as much alike as molasses and vinegar, but all the same, whenever I see one of you, I always think of the other. Once I had a hunch that he was you; but while he stood looking at me I called *you* on the telephone and *you* answered. Bring up this subject some other time and I'll talk about it. But just now there is another one that I want to get out of my system."

"Indeed. What is it?"

"You just now referred to G. Mortimer Branton—the great Branton. He's a pretty close friend of yours, isn't he?"

"Hardly that, Miss Stacey. Very rich men, like Branton, are rarely close friends with anybody. But we are friendly—quite so—if that is what you mean."

"Do you know his daughter Ethel?"

"Very well indeed. An unusually beautiful girl, and as good as she is beautiful."

"I know her, too; and she *is* as good as she is beautiful. Better—a heap better." Jess was silent for a moment and very thoughtful. Then: "She—well, she stood for me once when I certainly did need somebody to do that very thing. Do you happen to know—that is, have you heard that anything has happened to her lately?"

"To Ethel Branton?"

"Yes."

"Why, no. Why do you ask that?"

"Oh, nothing much. Maybe it isn't anything, after all. Maybe I'm just foolish about it. Probably Miss Ethel wants to throw out a boost to somebody else like me."

"Will you tell me what in the world you are talking about, Miss Stacey?" Moreau asked.

"Sure. Somebody from Mr. Branton's office called me on the telephone this afternoon just when I had my things on to come here. He said that Mr. Branton wanted to see me—*me*, mind you. 'I guess you've got the wrong number,' I told him. But it wasn't that. He did want to see me—right then, if I could make it. Well, I couldn't. I said I had an appointment, and all that, and the whole long and short of it is that I am going there, to Branton's house, as soon as I leave here."

"But what about? What is it for?"

"Search me. That is what has been gettin' in on me. I can't make it fit together. It is something about Miss Ethel, and that is all I know."

"But why—"

"Oh, don't ask me! I don't know."

"You should have told me at once, Miss Stacey. We could have postponed this sitting. You may go now, if

you think you will find him at home. Did he set an hour when he would see you?"

"That clerk said I was to go there just as soon as ever I got free from my other engagement. And I was thinking—"

"Well?"

"You're middling chummy with G. Mortimer, when all's said. What's the matter with your calling him on the phone right now, telling him that I'm here, and that I'm just starting out to see him—and getting a line on what it's all about, yourself?"

The artist, without further remark, went into another room to the telephone. Jess darted into the dressing-room to resume her street costume. When she came out, twenty minutes later, Moreau was standing at one of the studio windows, gazing out across the forest of high buildings that confronted him.

"Be seated for a moment, Miss Stacey," he said quietly. "The matter is a serious one. I would like to talk to you about it before you go to see Mr. Branton."

Jess sank upon a convenient chair. Her face became grave also.

"Is she—is Miss Ethel—sick? Is that why I was sent for? You know I—I am real fond of her, if anybody should ask you."

"I am afraid—I am very much afraid that it is much worse than that," the artist replied. Then, when Jess, instead of answering him, only stared, he added: "She has disappeared."

Jess sat perfectly still until she had thoroughly absorbed the full significance of that statement and all that it might mean. Even then, instead of asking questions, she said sharply:

"Go on. I want to see every card in the deck, Mr. Moreau."

"I can't tell you very much. Her father would not go into details over the wire. He insisted upon speaking guardedly. I could only read between the lines of what he said, and from his manner of saying what he did, that Ethel has disappeared and that up to the present time they have been unable to get any trace of her. But I am going there to see him later. He preferred to talk about you rather than of Ethel."

"About me? What did he say about me?"

"He knows something—a very little—concerning what your former life was, Miss Stacey. He asked me if I thought you could help him—and if I thought you could be trusted with this secret—and if I believed that you *would* help if you *could*, even though some of your old associates might be involved."

"What did he mean by that?"

"There could be but one meaning, Miss Stacey. He did not utter it in words, but I understood. Mr. Branton fears—so do I—that his daughter has been abducted. He anticipates that the motive would be one of ransom, because he is such a very rich man. I fear, I have a horrible fear, that even now it may be too late for a ransom to save her."

Jess started to her feet, wide eyed.

"My God! You don't mean that, do you? Oh, no, *no, no!* Not that! Not for that sweet girl. Say, what did you tell him about trusting me?"

"That is an unnecessary question, isn't it?"

"Maybe so. I don't know. I'm going around there to see Mr. Branton."

"Wait a moment," Moreau said as she started toward the door.

"Well?" She turned, with one hand on the knob.

"What are you going to say to him—to Ethel's father?"

"I don't know. The whole reel hasn't been run off yet."

"If Ethel has been abducted—if you should become convinced that she has fallen into the hands of some of those red-light scouts—if you decide that to be the horrible danger that threatens her, what will you say to her father in that case, Miss Stacey? And what will you think yourself, no matter what you *say?*"

Jess left the door and returned to the center of the room. She bent partly forward toward the artist when she answered his questions. Her whole manner was tense and strained. She spoke rapidly, but, nevertheless, with care in what she said.

"If Ethel Branton has fallen into the hands of—Say, how long has she been gone?"

"Since yesterday, I gathered. Since some time yesterday afternoon."

"Well, she wouldn't be safe for an hour with some of that bunch of reptiles, and she might be all right for a day or two with another sort. She's sitting on the top of a loaded mine, and the fuse has been lighted. It all depends on how long the fuse is. That is the size of it. That is what I'll *think*, no matter what I *say* to Branton. But it won't make any difference in the way I'll *act*, no matter what I do think or say."

"How will you act? What did you mean when you said that?" Moreau asked.

"How will I act? I'll go to see that man Crewe we've been talking about."

"Why?"

"Why? Because if there is a man on top of God's green earth who can find Ethel Branton, it's Crewe. Oh, he's a crook, all right; but he's a man—and he's a white

one, even if he does wear a blotched face and a black record. He knows every crook in New York, and they all know him, and they are deathly afraid of him, at that."

"Shall you advise Mr. Branton to see this man Crewe?" Moreau seemed insistent on the point.

"You bet your sweet life I will. I'll tell him to go down there with a cold million in each hand, and to throw it into Crewe's lap and to say to him: 'I want my girl. I don't care how you get her, only get her for me.' Crewe can do it if anybody can. You'd say so, too, if you knew him as well as I do!"

"You will advise him, then, to go and see Crewe?" He was still strangely insistent.

"Yes."

"I think it will be good advice, Miss Stacey," Moreau replied.

CHAPTER XX

THE NEED OF A HERCULES

Birge Moreau lost no time in taking his own departure the moment that the studio door had closed behind Shannon's Jess. He knew the route that she would take to get to the Branton mansion. That short time he took at the telephone while she was resuming her street costume had been filled advantageously for his own hastily formed plans, and, to make use of an expression which would have occurred readily enough to her, he was going to "beat her to it."

He summoned a taxi to the Blank Street entrance to the building, and when Jess went out he followed soon after her and was whirled around corners to the banker's home, so that he arrived there a good ten minutes before she did.

Jess, when she came, was ushered into a small room off from the library; and when the banker entered it a few moments later she was standing before that great painting by Guido which pictures the mythological struggle between Hercules and the Son of Mother Earth.

She turned about quickly when Branton entered, but her eyes were still introspective with the subject of the painting, which had greatly impressed her; more, perhaps, because Ethel Branton had once told her about the masterpiece and the story it depicted.

Branton approached her rapidly and stopped. Then he bethought himself and offered his hand in greeting. Jess pretended not to see it.

"Let me talk first, Mr. Branton," she said quickly. "I couldn't even guess why you sent for me to-day, unless Miss Ethel was sick or something like that, and wanted to see me. Even then I couldn't quite dope it out. I came here determined to be my own natural self, Mr. Branton, for that is the only way in which I can serve you with the best that is in me. . . . Well, if I had guessed that Miss Ethel had disappeared, or anything like that, I'd have come to you at once; I wouldn't have waited. Then, over at Mr. Moreau's studio, where I am posing for him, I told him of your request, and asked him to phone to you. That is all. Now, what is it that you think I can do for you?"

"I think possibly that, better than any other person, you can help me to find Ethel," the banker replied with characteristic directness.

"Why?"

"I don't know why—exactly. The thought was, I think, instinctive."

"Shall I help you to get at it?"

"Please."

"You knew that Ethel had befriended me and that I was grateful. You knew that I had once been a thief, and, therefore, that I know the underworld and the people of it fairly well."

"We will say that that is true."

"And you believe that she has fallen into the hands of—of whom and what?"

"I don't know. I don't know. I dread the worst. I fear it."

"Then, if you fear that, you already have a reason for it which you have not stated."

"That is quite true, Miss Stacey."

"Tell it to me."

"In a moment. First I wish to be assured that I may

depend upon you that no word of my daughter's disappearance shall reach the newspapers or the police—at least, not until I have granted permission."

"You may depend upon me. But—do you care more for your social standing than for your daughter?"

"That is a foolish question. I care more for my daughter's reputation than for all my worldly possessions put together."

"Mr. Branton?"

"Yes?"

"There is one thing which, if I say it to you, may put you more at ease with me. It is this: Ethel Branton, your daughter, is, to me, a woman apart from all the rest of the world. I love her. If I could restore her to entire safety at this moment by giving up my own life, or even by thrusting myself back again into that former life of mine which is worse than death, I would not hesitate at either sacrifice. Do you believe me, sir?"

"Yes. May I shake hands with you?" . . . . .

"Will you tell me now that reason which you have not yet stated which makes you fear that the worst may have befallen Ethel since her disappearance?" Jess asked as soon as the banker had resumed his seat. "That unstated reason which led you to believe that I might help to find her?"

"Yes. Last night at eleven o'clock a special-delivery letter was brought to me just at the time when I was engaged in telephoning anywhere and everywhere that I could think of, for news of Ethel. The thought of possible abduction had not then occurred to me. Here is the short note that came. I will read it to you."

"No. Let me see it."

Apparently the note had been written without any attempt to disguise the handwriting. It was brief. It stated:

Be at northeast corner Second Avenue and Fifteenth Street alone at midnight to half past twelve if you want information. Bring no money. This is no ransom dodge. You will be asked to agree to something. Use any public hack or taxi. Stay inside of it till spoken to.

"Did you go there?" Jess asked.

"Certainly."

"And did you comply with the conditions?"

"Absolutely. You are the only person who knows of the existence of that message."

"What happened?"

"Nothing happened. I was driven in my own car to Madison Square. I went from there to the place of appointment in a hired hack. I arrived at five minutes before twelve. I waited until a quarter past one and came away. But the neighborhood, the character of the message, *the fact that somebody who would send such a note was informed of my great trouble, when I had told practically nobody*—frightened me."

Jess nodded.

"I used to live in that neighborhood myself," she said.

"I remembered that, Miss Stacey. Ethel told me something about it once when she had been to see you. That is why I sent for you."

"Did it occur to you that perhaps I might be personally connected with this thing?"

"Frankly, it did."

"Do you still have such an idea, even remotely, in your mind?"

"No. I beg your pardon for thinking of it at all. But—"

"You need not, Mr. Branton. Won't you tell me, instead, all that you know of the happenings of yesterday?"

"Ethel went out between two and three—about half

past two. She had ordered out one of the cars, but she countermanded the order. She walked. The footman who opened the door for her saw a youth give something into her hand at the bottom of the steps. He does not know if it was a letter, but thinks it might have been. He closed the door and saw nothing more. He thinks that Ethel started down the avenue, but is not even sure of that much. I felt no particular anxiety concerning her until about ten o'clock, although she had never absented herself without telephoning or sending a message home. By ten o'clock I began to be really frightened. I telephoned to every place I could think of where she might have gone. I sent out messengers. I did everything that could be done to get trace of her. Then that message came. She went frequently to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This morning I went there myself. One of the employees recalled that he had seen Ethel late yesterday afternoon, in conversation with a young man —of whom he could give no description at all.

"That, Miss Stacey, is the extent of my knowledge. She had, and has had, no love affair of any kind. Of that I am positive. Even if there had been one, she would not have gone from us in this manner, of her own accord. I am positive of that, too. To-day I have had the hospitals, the morgue, the police stations, the records of accidents, and every place and thing that could be thought of, searched. There is nothing; there is not a sign of her anywhere. I have a great force of detectives at my command through my association with banks and railroads and so forth. I have made use of them without stint, knowing that I could depend upon their secrecy. Through it all that special-delivery letter kept constantly returning to my mind. Then I thought of you and summoned you. That, Miss Stacey, is the whole story."

"And your exact thought about her now is—what?"

"Ethel has been abducted. Whether in the hope of obtaining a large ransom, or because of her personal beauty, I dare not try to guess. If she has fallen into the power of the scoundrels who traffic in young girls, God help her! But even so, I must find her, and I must get her back home. But that letter makes me think that she may be unharmed, though detained. The writer of it wanted me to agree to something. What could it have been?"

Jess shook her head. The banker bent forward.

"Her abductors must belong to that underworld which you once knew so well," he said. "If they hold her for ransom, either in the form of money or in my consent to something else, she may be unharmed. She must be found, in any case. Will you go back into that world you have left, and search for her, Miss Stacey?"

"I will seek her with my whole heart and soul in the effort," Jess replied, rising. She turned toward the Guido and added: "It will be a struggle like that one. Ethel has fallen into the power of the Son of Mother Earth, and you need a Hercules to lift his feet from the ground and throw him. There *is* such a Hercules, Mr. Branton. He is a man named Crewe. Mr. Moreau will tell you how to find him. If anybody can find Ethel Branton, it is that man Crewe. I will go to him, too. But you go, in person. Go to Crewe."

* * *

Birge Moreau entered the room when Jess had gone.

The banker was pacing slowly up and down it, his hands behind him, his head bowed. His face was set and hard and cold in the mental effort to face this greatest crisis of his life. He realized the absolute necessity of entire self-control. He addressed the artist abruptly.

"She advised me to see a man named Crewe—a saloon-keeper—a crook. But I cannot do that, Birge. The facts will get abroad. The newspapers will get hold of it."

"Why did you send for this woman to come to see you?" Moreau asked quietly.

"Because I have tried to think of every possible explanation of Ethel's disappearance, and one of them that offered itself was that this former criminal, whom she had once befriended, might be concerned in it—for profit."

"And now, since you have talked with Shannon's Jess?"

"I'd about as soon think that you were mixed up in the affair as that she is."

"Well, isn't her advice to you worth thinking about? The same motive is behind it, apparently, that induced you to send for *her*."

"Do you mean that Crewe might be concerned in the affair himself?"

"No. But undoubtedly he is acquainted with the men who are."

"I will think about it, Birge. I haven't decided. I must keep it quiet. I must keep this thing away from the newspapers. I must do that for Ethel's sake."

"I imagine that Crewe would be the first one to advise that course, Mr Branton."

"I'll think about it. I will think about it," the banker repeated. "I did not intend that even you should know."

"Somebody must know—if Ethel is to be found—in time."

The financier raised his head angrily. He wore, habitually, the air of anger. Just now it was more pronounced than usual.

"Don't you suppose I know that?" he demanded. "I

have already been in communication with the heads of the two greatest detective agencies in the country. They are sworn to secrecy, and are at work. Besides that, I have my own force of secret agents which I control through my association with banks and railroads. I have got more men on the case, right now, than the whole detective force of New York City could muster. Do you advise me to take the police into my confidence?"

"I will not advise as to that. You must follow your own judgment. Suppose you tell me all that you know about Ethel's disappearance? Even I might be able to help some."

"I don't know anything—only this," and he repeated in almost the same words the information he had given to Jess; and gave him the letter to read.

At the close of the recital Moreau gave it back with the remark:

"If you do go to see this man Crewe, show him that note, and let him keep it for a time, if he wants to. Now, about that employee at the museum who saw Ethel in conversation with a young man. What is his name?"

"Gibbons. He's a fool! He just saw her there—and saw a man talking to her. He does not know positively if the man was black or white. He doesn't know if Ethel was in the place five minutes or two hours. He didn't see her enter or leave."

"What about the footman who opened the door for Ethel when she left home?"

For reply Branton rang the bell and the footman appeared in response to it.

"Tell Mr. Moreau about that young man whom you saw approach Miss Ethel when she went out of the house yesterday afternoon," he ordered.

"He wasn't a young man, sir—he was more like a

boy. I am not sure that he spoke to Miss Ethel or gave her anything—I only thought so at the time."

"What did he look like?" Moreau asked.

"Well, sir, a good deal like the sort that you see standing at street corners of an evening, using bad language, and all that sort of thing. I closed the door. I didn't even see which way Miss Ethel turned, but it was my impression that she went down the avenue."

"Just a moment, Moreau," Branton said. "You may go, Bixby. Now, Birge, I see what you are after. I have had a dozen detectives nosing around the museum all day. They have not been able to discover a single thing. One young woman, 'who might have been Ethel,' was seen to get into a taxicab with two young men. But *that* young woman got into it willingly and drove away, without protest, with two men—and Ethel would not do that. It's preposterous."

"Why do you say, 'who might have been Ethel,' as if the expression were a quotation?" the artist asked.

"Because that young woman answered better than others to the description of Ethel that I gave them, as she was dressed at the time. Her maid supplied me with that description. There were others who entered cabs and cars and buses, and who walked away from the place, who would have answered to it just as well."

Moreau left his chair. At the door he stopped. He said:

"Ethel ordered out one of your cars. Then she countermanded the order. Then she left home, walking. Somebody spoke to her in the street, in front of the house, and, without a doubt, delivered a message. She went to the museum. Every attendant there knows her. Only one of them saw her. That means that she entered and passed out again, almost without pausing. If she had remained there long, or had moved about very much

while there, others of the attendants would have seen her and remembered it. She spoke to a young man, and Gibbons did not know him, so she must have passed through the building and out of it with that young man. She disappeared from that moment, so it is likely that she was the young woman 'who might have been Ethel,' who entered the taxi with two men. She did it willingly, and therefore she must have known, at least, one of them. It was not likely one of her regular acquaintances who is known to you, for everybody at the museum knows your daughter, and knows—by sight, at least—persons who go there with her, or whom she is likely to meet there and recognize. If that young woman 'who might have been Ethel', was Ethel, if she entered the cab willingly and was driven away apparently without protest, the act was—must have been—the culmination of a plot against her to force her into the doing of that very thing.

"Now, if we accept these surmises of mine—and we will do that in passing—we must seek for a motive on the part of her abductors. This note that was sent to you last night repudiates the idea of ransom; but it also says quite plainly that your consent to some sort of an agreement or compromise is sought and will be demanded. And that suggests, abstractly, matrimony. Wait, please. . . . In that, we again have a sort of assurance of Ethel's temporary safety. Do you follow me closely, Branton?"

"Yes. Go on."

"She could not have been forcibly abducted from that locality without attracting attention to the fact; hence, she must have entered the cab willingly; and hence, the girl 'who might have been Ethel', was Ethel. She had no idea of any danger threatening her until after she had entered the cab. Her companion? A man who was un-

known to you, doubtless, but who was known to her; and, therefore, probably an old acquaintance. One of childhood, of school-days, or something of that sort. . . . Has it occurred to you, I wonder, that a large percentage of so-called crooks are recruited from the ranks of promising young men who go wrong, who commit mistakes, who get into the clutch of the law, who fall under the ban of the police 'system' and cannot escape from it, who go from bad to worse, and yet who inevitably retain the instinctive associations of gentlemen and gentlewomen? Don't answer now. But let me advise you to spend the night in going through the small keepsakes, letters, and school-day memories of your daughter, which may be found in the sacred precincts of her own rooms in this house; for it does look to me as if somewhere in her short past there is a man who is responsible for what has happened. And let us hope and pray that he has enough gentility left in him to protect her."

CHAPTER XXI

HEADQUARTER'S ADVICE

"I HATE to do it, but I guess I've got to," was the comment that Jess made to herself in an undertone when the door of Branton's house had closed behind her. "I've got to show my face down at Crewe's. I hate to do it, but if I want to see him, it's got to be done—and this very night, too."

"What a pity it is that Branton did not come to me at once, instead of letting a whole twenty-four hours go past, with nothing accomplished," was the mental comment of Birge Moreau as he reëntered the taxicab at the curb.

Down at police headquarters, one hour later, G. Mortimer Branton left his chair beside the commissioner's desk and reached for his hat and cane. Notwithstanding his former determination to keep the disappearance of his daughter a secret, the talks with Jess and with the artist had changed his mind in part. He had decided, immediately after the departure of Moreau, to make the whole affair public.

The commissioner, the inspector in charge of the detective bureau, and two of the best operatives in the department, rose from their chairs at the same time.

"That is all, gentlemen," Branton said. He was composed and calm. "There is no reward too great for me to bestow upon the man who will restore my daughter to me. Find her for me, if you can. If she lives and has suffered, bring her back to me. I will make the man

who does it independent for the rest of his life, and I will bless him and be his good friend to the end of my days."

The commissioner walked to the door with him, and, holding it for a moment before he opened it, said:

"Thorough publicity is best, Mr. Branton. The whole country will be stirred by the news in the morning. It is not too late to hope for a substantial clew that your daughter, or her abductors, if there were such, may have left. I have hope that this department will be able to accomplish much. Newspaper publicity, far and wide, and the active interest of the police all over the world, stimulated by the hope of reward, may result in something definite. Let us hope so."

The inspector, who overheard the last part of his superior's remarks, came forward and passed into the corridor with the financier. The latter stopped him as they were about to separate.

"Can you give me no hope, inspector?" he asked.

"Mr. Branton, if I reply truthfully, I must tell you that we have a habit with us, down here, of saying that we can do things. But, in my opinion, a big reward is the thing—now. If it is big enough, and reaches the right quarter, it may serve to stimulate some 'squealer' of the underworld. That is the quickest source from which we can hope for anything definite."

"I understand you, I think, inspector?"

"I mean that if your daughter was abducted by an out-and-out crook, or by two or three of them, a reward that is big enough might induce one of them to squeal. That, in my opinion, is your best course."

The financier bowed his head sadly and was silent. The inspector continued:

"You have got to look facts in the face, Mr. Branton."

"I understand you, I think, inspector."

"Mr. Branton, would you like me to advise you as a man of experience, who forgets for a moment that he is a policeman, and remembers only that he is also a father?"

"Please, inspector. Yes, tell me what you would suggest."

"It isn't professional—but it is what I would do, in your place."

"Tell me what it is."

"I would see—Crewe."

"Crewe again. Who *is* Crewe?"

The inspector laughed shortly.

"Even we don't know *who* Crewe is, or *what* he is, Mr. Branton. There are some of us down here who think we know—but we don't. Ostensibly he is proprietor of a saloon, and there isn't a more orderly place in the city than his. All the same, it is the resort of every class of criminal that is known on our records. There is not, it is safe to say, a crook in New York, and few outside of it, whom Crewe doesn't know. If there is a man on top of earth who can find your daughter for you, it is that same man Crewe. Take it from me. And please forget that *I* said it."

"I think I recall the name now, inspector. He was concerned in that matter of $81,500 of mine that was missing, wasn't he?"

"*He* wasn't. His *place* was. The men that frequent his place were."

"I remember. Will you take me to see him?"

"I? Hardly. Send him a letter. Call him on the telephone and make an appointment with him. Here—I'll write down his address for you. It isn't far from Washington Square. Go there yourself, if you like.

I'm not sure that it wouldn't be a good plan for you to do that very thing."

"Would it be quite safe for me to go there alone?"

"Safe? There isn't a safer place in New York than Crewe's. There has never been a crime, or even a petty theft, committed there, since he ran it. You'll be as safe in Crewe's as you would be in church. Safer, maybe. We pinched a woman last Sunday who was working mesh-bags in churches. That same woman wouldn't pick up a nickel from the floor in Crewe's place, because she wouldn't dare."

"Do women go there?"

"Sometimes. They're not welcome. They have to go in with an escort, and go out again with the same one; and they have to do the perfect-lady stunt while they're there."

"You think, you believe, do you, that this man Crewe can help me?"

"I believe that if anybody can do it, Crewe is that man. But—you're not to quote me, Mr. Branton."

"Certainly not. But I will follow your advice. I will make an appointment with Crewe at once."

For some unexplained reason there was a broad smile on the face of the inspector when he returned to his desk a few moments later. Branton left the building, murmuring:

"I will see this man Crewe at once. Miss Stacey advised it, Moreau advised it, and now the inspector advises it."

CHAPTER XXII

THE RIGHT MAN

MIDNIGHT at Crewe's. Crewe put out bottle and glasses for Detective Holderness as soon as the latter had stepped inside of the doorway. Then he leaned upon the bar with his hands wide apart, and in the glare of the electric lights the blemish on his face showed with unusual hideousness. Holderness waved the proffered refreshments aside.

"I'm off the stuff, Crewe," he said, grinning. "I'll take a little of your kind to-night."

"I had a wireless that you were off the force, too, Holdy," Crewe replied, while he changed the character of the bottle. "That cry-baby confession of Shaughnessy's must 'a' pretty near got your goat. Didn't they have you up on charges?"

"Sure." Holderness closed one eye in a slow wink. "But I saw a friend of mine up-town. I'm all right. Them charges'll be forgotten before they're pushed."

Crewe nodded and took a swallow of seltzer.

"Expensive call, wasn't it—that one you made up-town?" he drawled.

Holderness winked with the other eye and changed the subject.

"Come into the back room a minute, Crewe," he said—"I want to talk to you."

"Then I guess you'll have to do it where you stand, Holdy. Christy's off duty, and I'm all alone. What have you got in your think-bag?" Crewe replied.

"You said something about a wireless a minute ago. Well, I've got one that's a corker. I wanted to put you wise, thinkin' that mebby you 'n' me could do the act together an' rake off the reward. It's goin' to be some reward, too. What time'll Christy get back?"

Instead of replying, Crewe walked around the end of the bar in response to a signal from one of the few occupied tables in the place, returned with some empty glasses, filled fresh ones, carried them back, returned once more, washed and wiped the empties with deliberate thoroughness, and then leaned against the bar with his outstretched hands, as before.

"What's it all about, Holdy?" he asked, as if there had been no break in their conversation.

"It's about the big fellow down-town again," the officer replied. "Branton."

"Has he been losing another stuffed envelope?" Crewe inquired.

"No. He's lost something this time that's worth a heap sight more'n any stuffed envelope you ever dreamed about, Crewe. That eighty-one-five wasn't a roe-egg in a shad compared with this thing."

"Wa'n't, eh? What has he lost now?"

"His girl."

"His—*what?*"

"His daughter. She has been gone since yesterday."

"Do you mean to tell me, Holdy, that the cops have been looking for G. Mortimer Branton's daughter since yesterday, and that there hasn't been a word about it in the papers or anywhere? Come down off the perch—you're too high up."

"Cops nothin'! I'm about the only cop in New York that knows a thing about it yet. The old man has kept it as still as a stuffed mummy. But all the same he's had about a thousand men, more 'r less, lookin' for her.

They've scraped the edges of things all the way from Dan to Beer-sheeby—and then some. There's been the quiet tip to each and every man that's worked on the case to-day, that success would mean an independent fortune, and that blabbin' an' squealin' or givin' up the news about it would mean good night for the guy that done it. The old man has had the Pinks and the Hot Ones and all the big private agencies workin' overtime, and there ain't a damn one of 'em that's turned up so much as a smell-in. That girl just stepped into the Metropolitan Museum of Art and out of it again, an' dissolved, without leavin' so much as a grease-spot to track her by. And she's been gone since early in the afternoon yestady. That's what gets *me!*"

"Where'd you dig up all this private information, Holdy?" Crewe asked, without a change of countenance.

Then, before a reply could be made, he responded to another signal from his customers, served more drinks, wiped more glasses and put them away; after which he repeated the question, word for word.

"I got it all right—you needn't worry about that part of it," was the response. "The whole snap will be given out to-morrow morning."

"What was that you said about you 'n' me doing the trick together and pinchin' the reward, Holdy? Were you thinking that maybe I stole the girl?"

Holderness closed that left eye of his again, even more slowly than he had done it before. Then he laughed aloud.

"No," he said. "I had not thought of *that*. But, say, it would have been a great play for you if you *had* thought of it—*and done it*. Say, Crewe, you can shoot me if it wouldn't have been like you, all right, if you *had* thought of it. No—I didn't think of it before. But—it *would* 'a' been like your cheek."

"Like this one." Crewe touched the blemished side of his face tentatively. "Maybe it would, Holdy," he added quietly. "And just about as pretty to look at, too."

"Aw, say, Crewe, I didn't mean—"

"I know it. Drop it. What's your proposition? Let's hear it."

Crewe waited upon other customers and polished more glasses before he could give attention to the answer. The interval gave Holderness ample time to get his reply into shape.

"I don't go so far's to say that any one of your bunch is wise to this disappearin' act of Ethel Branton's, but what I do say is this: Her goin' off like that was the work of the underworld and not of any part of the world she lived in. Being the work of the underworld, it's a cinch that some of the bunch that comes in here is on speakin' terms with the ones that done it; and, more'n likely, you are yourself. But the ones that done it ain't sayin' nothin' 'r doin' nothin' that'll give the snap away, not so's you could notice it; an' the consequence is that there ain't nobody wise about it except the ones that did do it; and there ain't goin' to be anybody put wise, either. And a cop 'r a bull 'r a stool-pigeon will have about as much show of diggin' up wisdom as an honest patrolman would have of being made inspector." He hesitated for an instant and then added: "All the same, Crewe, *you can do it.*"

Crewe, without replying, started to pass around the end of the bar to serve more customers. But at that instant the door was opened quickly and G. Mortimer Branton walked boldly into the place.

"For the love of Mike, look who's comin'!"

Holderness had heard the door open, and turned just as Crewe resumed his former position behind the bar,

with his arms stretched wide apart and his fingers grasping the inner edge of it.

Crewe, save for one quick glance out of his eye, made no motion whatever. Holderness swung around again, facing Crewe as soon as he had spoken. G. Mortimer Branton entered the place alone and approached the bar. There was a general stir throughout the room, then dead silence. The furtive-eyed folk knew, to a man, who the newcomer was.

Rarely a week passed when the great millionaire's picture did not appear in at least one of the daily papers; never a day passed when those men did not read them. It was part of their stock in trade to do that.

Branton had gone to Crewe's alone in a taxicab. He had chosen a late hour of the night because he was better able to avoid observation at that time. Remembering all that the inspector had said to him, he did not care how many denizens of the underworld might see him and recognize him. The more the better, he thought; and he made his appearance at that psychological moment which followed the statement made by Detective Holderness across the bar to Crewe, in which he had said, "All the same, Crewe, you can do it."

The brain of Detective Holderness was busy indeed during the short interval that Branton consumed in crossing from the door of the saloon to the bar. He remembered that Branton had seen him and talked with him once several months ago. He recalled also that he had been told that the financier never forgot a face that he had once seen. He decided to seem not to recognize Branton.

The latter approached the bar above the middle of it. Holderness strolled down the room to an unoccupied table, picked up a paper that was there, glanced through

it hastily, put it down, and went out upon the street. Crewe moved leisurely along behind the bar until he confronted Branton, and stood as any other bartender might have done who was expectantly awaiting an order.

"A pony of brandy and some soda-water, please," Branton said in a matter-of-fact tone. Then, when a bottle had been selected from the back bar and was set before him, "Are you Mr. Crewe?"

"Yes," said Crewe. He pushed the neck of a soda bottle into the opener and detached the cap.

"Do you know who I am?"

"Every man in this place knows who you are." Crewe put that bottle down beside the other one.

"Can you guess why I am here?"

"I haven't tried—further than to respond to your expressed wish." Crewe indicated the brandy by a slight gesture.

"Are any of those men who are here likely to hear what I may say to you?"

"Not if you speak low enough," the saloon-keeper answered.

"I am in great trouble, Mr. Crewe. My daughter Ethel has disappeared. She has been gone since yesterday. I have made every possible effort to find her and have failed. There has been absolutely no trace of her found anywhere. I am entirely ignorant of her fate or whether she is alive or dead. I have employed what I considered to be the best skill obtainable with no result whatever. Late this afternoon it was suggested to me that you might help me. Can you?"

"That is rather a blunt question, isn't it?"

"I am a blunt man, Mr. Crewe. Was I unwise to appear here in person?"

"It does not matter whether you were or not. You are here."

"Can you help me?"

"I don't know."

"Will you make the effort?"

"Possibly. Who sent you to me?"

"I am sorry that I cannot tell you that, Mr. Crewe. I am under an implied promise not to do so."

"Very well. Let it go at that. You were at headquarters late this afternoon. I know of only one man there who would send you to me, and he would not do it officially. If you have come from that person it means that you have taken the police into your confidence."

"I have done more than that. I have decided to take the public into my confidence. The morning papers will tell everything that is known about the case. There is to be no more secrecy."

"You will scarcely publish the fact that you have been here to consult with me, will you?"

"I would publish the fact that I had consulted with the devil himself if it were true—and would help."

The faint glimmer of a smile shone in Crewe's eyes.

"You had better go away now, Mr. Branton," he said.

"But I haven't told you what I will do for you in case you can help me."

"You need not tell me. I have not said yet that I would try. I will let you know if the necessity should arise for another interview."

"Thank you. I think I understand. You don't care to commit yourself. I have a considerable sum of money with me. Can I leave some of it with you? Shall I send you a check? The amount does not concern me, whether you use it in rewards or otherwise. I want my daughter."

"I understand *you*, also."

"Find her for me. Restore her to me. Pay what you like, where you like, and for whatever reason you like.

Even agree to immunity for those who have wronged her if that will avail. There is no limit. I want *her*."

Crewe nodded.

"I will help you if I can," he said. "It may be that I can. I don't know. I will try. Please go away now. If I should want anything I will send to you for it."

"I am not to mention having been here?"

Crewe shrugged his shoulder. "As you like about that. I shall not speak of it."

"These men who are in the room—"

"Their principal asset is a close mouth."

"That man who was here and who went outside soon after I entered, will tell of it. That was Holderness, from the detective bureau. He came to my office once on another matter."

"He hasn't gone far. He will come back after you have gone."

"Mr. Crewe, offer these men—offer all the men of their world—any sum or sums you please, for information concerning my daughter. I see that you are anxious that I should go. Good night. I thank you for your patience with me. You will not accept any money now, or a check?"

"No."

"Could I, perhaps, offer these men who are here, refreshments?"

"I will attend to that, in your name, after you have gone. You will not care to drink with them."

"Why not? Very well. You know best. Good night."

The front door opened just as Branton turned toward it. A woman entered. It was Jess, but her manner indicated that she wished Branton not to recognize her.

Branton halted abruptly, boring her with his eyes.

"Who is she?" he asked in an aside, of Crewe, deciding

that he would accept her cue and would not appear to know her.

"That," said Crewe, "is Shannon's Jess. Good night, sir."

Branton passed outside.

CHAPTER XXIII

ON THE LEVEL

THE entrance of Jess created more of a stir in the room than the coming of the great Branton had done.

There had been a time when she was one of their kind; but it was generally understood—and as generally approved of secretly—that she was "on the level" now, and had been so since the passing of Shannon.

She saw the quick but penetrating stare that Branton bent upon her, but gave no outward heed to it. Her glance swept upon him and past him precisely as it seemed to comprehend in one look, the entire personnel of the room. She nodded toward Crewe, being quite aware that he disapproved of her presence. Women were never welcomed there. They were endured—if they were properly escorted, and were quiet and orderly.

Jess entered the place without an escort, which was a distinct innovation and an infringement of the unwritten law at Crewe's. She passed down the length of the room and seated herself at a table, which was another fracture of the custom. She believed that it would bring Crewe to her side at once; and it did.

"What's on your mind, Jess?" he asked. "It must be something heavy or you wouldn't have done this."

"It is, or rather was," she replied, smiling up at him. Jess was a handsome woman, and her smile was a wonder when she chose to render it so. "I came to find out if you had heard the news, Crewe. I got my answer when I opened the door."

"Where did you hear it?" he asked coldly.

"From the man I once thought was your double," she replied, with steady gaze fixed full upon him. "Not that you look particularly alike, although—"

"We couldn't with this, Jess." He touched the blemish on his face and smiled. She continued as if there had been no interruption:

"Although you might be brothers at that; and when you smile, as you did just now— Well, you make me wonder. That's all."

Customers were rapping for him. He went behind the bar to serve them. Christy, his bartender, entered while he was there and put on his apron. After a time Crewe returned to Jess.

"I never had a brother, Jess; that is a truthful reply to your surmise," he told her, standing directly in front of her and looking down with a not unkindly light in his eyes. "Who is the man?"

"Don't you know? I thought you did. Moreau, the artist. Say, Crewe, are you playing me? I'm some difficult if I've got a puzzle to work out. I told Mr. Moreau, once upon a time, that I thought he was you. And once you heard me telephone to him when I thought *you* were Moreau. He answered, all right, and I—well, I tucked the incident away in my memory for future reference. Get me?"

"So the artist told you the news, did he?" Crewe ignored her questions and inferences, and his manner was as if he regarded them as trivial. "When?"

"To-day—this afternoon. I'm a full-fledged model now. He found engagements for me with other artists. I was Medea this morning, and Juno this afternoon. To-morrow I'm to be Minerva for a whole class. It's good pay, too."

"Glad to hear it, Jess. That ought to be reason

enough for your not coming down here, even if there weren't plenty of others. You can't swim in muddy water without swallowing some of the dirt."

"Oh, I know that I busted your rules when I came in! I won't stay long. I wanted to talk to you."

"About this news you have referred to?"

"Sure!"

"I understood that it wasn't to be published till morning."

"Oh, Branton talked over the phone with the artist this afternoon! That's how I got it. Somebody must have sent Money-Bags to you; he'd never have made it on his own hook. Who sent him?"

"He didn't tell me that himself."

"I see." She nodded her head wisely. "I'm on." She smiled up at Crewe again. "He must have gone to headquarters. The inspector thinks that the bulls can't work out this little fifteen-puzzle, eh? Well, they can't. That's a cinch. Maybe if he had you and me over there, Crewe, he could do something."

"What was your idea in coming down to see me tonight, Jess?" Crewe was still standing. To seat himself beside her would be to invite her to remain, and he did not want her to do that.

"I had a hunch that you'd help me find that girl. She was good to me once. I want to find her—that's all. And I want you to help me. You know, and I know, that there ain't but one man in New York that can find Ethel Branton, if she is to be found at all. Are you going to take on the job?"

"I haven't decided, Jess."

"Oh, stop the whirligig! You decided before Branton had finished asking the question. You needn't tell me if you don't want to. I know the answer now. Say, Crewe!"

"Well?"

"I saw Holdy outside tryin' to hide himself in a doorway, just before I came in. Has headquarters put that guy wise, already?"

"Is this a pumping-match, Jess? There he comes now. You'd better ask him, hadn't you?"

Jess laughed lightly and amusedly.

"Holdy is about everything that isn't a man," she said. "He's a four-flusher, a double-crosser, a grafter, and a bigger crook at heart than ever Brian Shaughnessy was when he played Shannon. Only Holdy ain't got the sand. Ask him? Sure! Send him over to me. I'd like to talk to him."

"I want you to go, Jess; and go now."

"Why? I'm respectable, ain't I?"

"That's the principal reason. You're on the level now, and I want you to stay so; and you can't stay so if you mix it up with the bunch that comes here, no matter what your purpose may be. You've done time as a forger; you've been something of a 'dip,' and your picture and thumb-prints are on record. But you're living straight now, and the bulls are leaving you alone. They won't if you come here. You know that. They'll begin to hound you; they'll touch you for graft, and if you don't give up they'll frame something. Before you know it you'll be back right where you were. You don't want to get back there—do you, Jess?"

Jess stared at Crewe in open-eyed amazement before she answered. Then:

"Say, Crewe, old Branton himself ain't got a wad big enough to make that play with *me*. If you knew the clear joy of being strictly on the straight and narrow, you'd be for climbing on board yourself. You needn't give yourself any nervines for this uneasiness about me. I'm anchored to that level spot

so tight that the United States Treasury couldn't pull me off of it. . . . Holdy's coming this way. I'll duck in a minute. 'Hello, Holdy! You must have paint on your clothes, you was huggin' that door so tight when I lamped you three houses above. Doing the special-guard act for his nibs with the long bank-roll?"

"What're you doin' down here, Jess?" Holderness demanded gruffly, pulling out a chair and seating himself, not ill-pleased by the inference that he had been acting as special body-guard for the great man. "Give us a drink, Crewe? What'll you have, Jess?"

"Crewe doesn't keep what I want, and you couldn't buy it if he had it," she replied, rising. She started away, but Holderness put out a hand and caught her by the arm.

"Here, you!" he said roughly. "You ain't answered my question yet. What are you doing down here at Crewe's, anyhow? What's the answer?"

Jess wrenched her arm free from his grasp. Her eyes blazed. She partly raised one hand as if to strike the man, thought better of it, and withheld the blow. Then she laughed, turning her back upon Holderness as he jumped to his feet.

"Gee!" she said, addressing Crewe. "I wonder what I've been exposed to now? I'll have to rip out that sleeve and burn it. Disinfectants wouldn't touch the microbes he's left on it. Good night, Crewe." She extended her right hand, and Crewe took it. "You get word to Polly, will you? If it's true that she's sick and needs me, let me know. I ain't forgot old times."

It was pure fiction about "Polly," of course, and was invented only as an explanation of her presence to satisfy Holderness; and she had used the first name that came to her that was associated with other times.

Crewe understood and replied with a nod of his head.

Jess turned toward the door. Holderness took one step forward as if to intercept her, but he caught Crewe's eyes fixed upon him and stopped. Then he sat down again.

"Bring me a drink, Crewe," he said. "I want to talk to you."

Jess moved slowly through the room, nodding to old acquaintances here and there. She felt bold and defiant. The sight of Holderness and contact with him had roused something within her that had been dormant, for she sincerely hated the man.

Half-way to the door she signaled to a young man at one of the tables, and when he came forward in response to it, said:

"Take me to the car, Jimmie. I'm too young to be out alone at this time of night."

Detective Holderness watched them go out together with an ugly scowl on his face.

"At it again, is she?" he said to Crewe. "Goin' out with that dip. I guess it won't be much of a job to send her away."

"Holdy"—Crewe bent just a trifle forward—"it wouldn't be safe for you to frame anything on Jess. *Don't forget that!*"

"What are you going to do about it, Crewe? About that Ethel Branton business, I mean. That's what brought the old man here to see you, ain't it?" Holderness changed the subject with an abruptness that was characteristic. Then, before Crewe could reply, "How much did he offer you? How much cash did he leave with you? Don't forget that there's a look-in comin' to me."

Crewe permitted him to finish. Then, very quietly: "There won't be any look-in coming to you, Holdy."

"What? What's that?"

Crewe did not reply. He did not change his expression save that possibly his eyes were harder, his lips a trifle more relentless in their lines. He turned his back upon Holderness and walked swiftly and softly—as he always did—to the narrow space behind the bar, glancing toward the clock and striking a bell that was on the rear shelf.

At every occupied table the customers rose in their places. The stroke of the bell was the signal for closing, and they know by experience that there was no appeal from it.

Some of them left the amounts they owed on the tables. Others, who were broke and had credit, called off the sums to Christy as they passed out. Two or three stopped at the bar long enough to receive change. Holderness alone remained seated. Crewe glanced toward him out of the corner of his eye. Then he passed around the end of the bar to the front door, which he threw wide open.

"Count up, Christy," he said; and unbolted the top and bottom of the other half of the door, which he opened also.

Holderness came to his feet instantly.

It was one thing to sit at a table in Crewe's place with the doors closed—quite another matter to do so after the closing hour and with the doors wide open, so that he might be seen and reported, for Holderness stood none too well with the inspector of that district, who was known to be honest.

He moved rapidly toward Crewe, who lingered in the doorway, but who stepped just outside when he heard the officer approaching. Holderness was glad of that. He much preferred to talk outside, where he would be entirely justified in being seen. But he was angry,

for he knew that the saloon-keeper had thrown open the doors purposely to be rid of him.

"What the hell do you mean, Crewe?" he demanded truculently, stepping past him.

Crewe moved swiftly backward. He closed one of the door-halves and shot the bolts into place at top and bottom with hand and foot.

"Call around to-morrow, Holdy," he said, and shut the other half of the door and locked it, fairly in the face of the police officer, who wheeled around, too late to interfere. It was incredible how swiftly Crewe could act when he chose.

Holderness banged upon the door with his fists. He was furious.

"Douse the glims, Christy," Crewe ordered. "You can turn them on again in a moment and admit our friend if he wants to come in. You can entertain him while you finish counting up. I've got to go out."

The lights in the place went out.

While one might have counted ten quickly they remained so. Then they flashed on again, and Christy went around to the door and opened it, for Holderness had not stopped pounding for admittance.

"Say! If you hadn't opened that door, I—" Holderness stopped. He glared around him.

"Gone, has he?" He followed Christy to the end of the bar and leaned his elbows upon it. "What in helen-blazes is the matter with you guys anyhow?" Christy made no reply. "Where'd Crewe go?"

"Oh! him? The shuffer of his air-o-plane was waitin', sarge, an' the boss had to hurry." Christy turned and put out bottle and glasses. "What'll you have—same?" Then he gave his attention again to the cash-register.

Holderness was not sparing in the drink he swallowed.

Afterward he walked to the door. From there, holding it open, he called back:

"Good night, Christy. Tell Crewe that I called back, will you? and that I want to see him to-morrow. Tell him, too, that he wants to see *me* to-morrow—*bad!* He doesn't know it, mebby, but you tell him. It's important. Don't forget."

Christy heard the door bang shut and grinned confidentially at the cash-register. Presently he remarked to the same unresponsive but sometimes noisy article:

"How ever the cops down in the big stone house can stand for that gink, gets my goat—horns, hoofs, an' whiskers! An' that is no merry jest, neither!"

Several blocks away, a few minutes later, a man sidled swiftly into a doorway he was passing and stood in the deeper shadow of it for a time, watching warily up and down the thoroughfare. Presently, with no more noise than a flitting shadow would have made, he climbed the stairs to the top of the house, and paused when he discovered the gleam of a light through a neglected crack under a door. Gliding forward, he scratched upon the door by drawing his thumb-nail several times across it.

There was a moment of silence after that. Then the door opened less than an inch, and without sound; and the man outside said:

"It's all right, Jimmie. Open up!" Then he passed inside.

"*Crewe!*" the occupant of the room exclaimed.

"Sure, Jimmie. Who did you expect?" the saloon-keeper replied, and seated himself on the edge of the bed while the man called Jimmie closed and fastened the door. He was a young man, and a good-looking one, with more the air of a college student than of what he really was—a pickpocket.

"I wasn't expecting anybody; least of all, you," he

answered his questioner not ungraciously and with perfect ease of manner. It was easy enough to see that he had not always been a resident of the nether world. He lighted a cigarette and pulled forward a chair. "I don't suppose this is a call of ceremony, Crewe. What is it?"

"Business, Jimmie. You left my place to-night with Jess. She asked you to go with her. Why?"

"She said she was too young to be out alone so late," the younger man replied, grinning.

Crewe made no response. He stared steadily and without change of expression. It was as if he had not heard the reply to his question and still waited for it. And Jimmie forgot to grin. Then he fidgeted. Presently he blurted out:

"You can search me, Crewe! If you can figure out what she was after, you're welcome. She didn't talk anything but ancient history, and only a little of that. I was never any good at remembering dates."

"What did she want to know, Jimmie?"

"Just the names and present locations and occupations of the bunch that has been working for me for the last two or three months. It is a rattling good mob, too, Crewe. The best ever. But the slickest and best one of the lot is as good as dead. That's Polly Burch. You remember her?"

Crewe nodded.

"Is she sick—dying? Is that what you mean?" he asked.

"She was, the last I heard of her. I shouldn't wonder if she's croaked by this time. I slipped her a hundred the last time I went to see her, and I sent her another about a week ago. I haven't heard anything about her since. She was Spread-Eagle's girl. They was going to be married, once."

"Jess did say something to me to-night about her

being very sick and needing help," Crewe remarked, meditatively.

"She did? That's funny."

"Why?"

"I thought she spoke as if she hadn't known anything about it, when I mentioned it. Anyhow, she said she would go and see Polly the first thing in the morning."

"Stringing you, likely. Jess always was a kidder. What was she asking you about the mob?"

"Nothing much. Somebody she knows got touched for a sparkler up at the Art Museum yesterday afternoon. She seemed to think that maybe the Spread-Eagle was working that neighborhood alone and might have got it. I think that he and the Con did go up that way somewhere about two o'clock. But I wasn't certain. I haven't seen the Spread since then. He had a date to meet me, too, last night, and he didn't keep it. He was in one of his tantrums all day yesterday, and he isn't safe to have around when he's in one of his ugly moods."

"Oh, I see! Never mind. I didn't know but it might have been something else she was after. Jess is on the level now, you know. Her showing up to-night was a surprise all around, I guess. I knew that she came out with you, and I was curious."

"I guess you thought that maybe she wanted to get back into the game—eh?"

Crewe shrugged. "Possibly. And I would not want her to do that. She is a good girl now, and I want her to stay so."

"You ought to start a mission-house somewhere, Crewe."

"Possibly I will. I have been thinking about it. Anyhow, I am glad to know that it was nothing more important than lost property that Jess was after. What

made her think that the Spread might have been the one to pinch the sparkler?"

"You can search me, Crewe. There are always good pickings there, late in the afternoon, for the right kind of dips, Crewe."

Crewe nodded. "It's dangerous, though. Not enough people. No crowds. Too risky."

"Not for the Spread-Eagle, if he was there. He could get your leather away from you in the middle of an open field when the sun was shining, and never rasp your cuticle in doing it, either."

"These are very decent quarters of yours, Jimmie," Crewe said, rising. "Good night."

"I wonder what in thunder he was after?" Jimmie asked himself when Crewe had gone. "There's something doing. I wonder what."

Then, notwithstanding the hour, he, too, went out.

CHAPTER XXIV

HERMES WAS A THIEF

BETIMES, the following morning, Jimmie rang the bell at a door in Herkimer Street. He knew, when the woman of the house opened the door, that he had arrived too late. Her eyes were red with weeping.

She had paid the last tribute to an erring daughter who had passed through the various stages of so many young and promising lives, which begin with the so-called dancing academies, which graduate from the turkey-trot and bear-hug to bad company, and frequently to prison sentences; and this one, like many another before her, had gone home to die.

"I'm sorry," he said when he had taken his seat. And he was. The woman who faced him knew nothing of his manner of living. He talked with her a few moments, then rose to go away. Polly, the mother informed him, had passed away the preceding day. Several of her acquaintances had heard of her illness too late to see her alive; among them Mrs. Shannon, who had called early that morning.

"Anyhow," he thought as he boarded a car for Park Row, "Jess didn't get anything from me that did her any good. Neither did Crewe. But what were they after? That is the question that gets my goat. The question of what became of Ethel Branton doesn't concern me; but it's a copper-riveted cinch that there is a whopping big graft somewhere in this business, or Jess

and Crewe and that slab-faced Holderness wouldn't have been so hot-foot on the trail."

Jimmie remained in a brown study all the way to New York, but the puzzle became only the more complex the more he thought about it.

By devious methods of questioning, which occupied the hours between one and three that afternoon, Jimmie finally settled upon three artists' names, any one of whom might belong to the creator of Juno where Jess was posing as model. They were all three located in the same building in Blank Street; two of them on the top floor and the other one just beneath. It being easier to walk down a flight of stairs than up it, Jimmie went directly to the top, studied the two names that were on doors nearly opposite each other, believed himself impressed by the euphony of the name Birge Moreau (for Jimmie, being college bred, admired euphony), and pushed the button.

Moreau opened the door in person, and he was alone. Jimmie entered the studio, alertly observant.

"I imagine there isn't much show for my talents here," Jimmie said, returning his gaze to the artist's face and scrutinizing it with his own shrewd eyes. "You see," he went on when Moreau raised his brows inquiringly, "my cash capital is running low. I never did much work. I don't like it, frankly. You use men for models sometimes, don't you?"

"Surely—when I need them. Did some one send you to me?"

"No. I just came. I picked out three names in this building. Here they are as I wrote them down," and he exhibited a slip of paper. "I am a novice. I have never posed. But one might learn, I suppose. And it's easy, isn't it?"

"Not particularly. Unfortunately, I am not in need of a male model just now."

"Sorry." Jimmy left his chair. "You couldn't direct me to an artist who is in need of one, could you?"

"I do not happen to know of such a one."

Jimmie turned leisurely about, viewing the convases.

"That is a perfectly ripping figure, if you'll permit me to say so, Mr. Moreau," he said presently. "What is it—a 'Juno'?"

The artist was lighting a cigar and did not reply at once; but, as if he appreciated the implied compliment, he crossed to the cords of the sky-light and adjusted the curtains for a better view. Then:

"Yes. I am glad you like it. Won't you be seated again? Unless you are in haste."

"Haste? I was never in a hurry in my life. Really, Mr. Moreau, that is a very striking subject. Your model for it must be an unusual woman. It's a pity that you haven't something in mind for which I could pose. Honestly."

Moreau half closed his eyes, regarding the picture. Then he replied:

"I have been thinking of doing a Hermes." He wheeled suddenly. "You might pose for that. I think you would fill the requirements."

"Do you—really?"

"Yes. Hermes was a thief, you know. Er—you might not like that. Eh? What?"

Jimmie could only stare in reply. He was not troubled by modesty, even concerning his own questionable talents. He continued to stare at Moreau only a moment. Then he dropped back upon the chair and laughed aloud.

"You got me, didn't you?" he said. "I wonder how? You're not a 'bull.' I don't seem to remember you, al-

though there is a faint trace of something familiar about you at present. May I smoke?"

Moreau nodded. He was silent a moment. Then:

"Artists are close observers," he said. "It becomes second nature to them to study faces. They are always seeking new lines of expression—for there are just as great a variety of expressions as there are many faces to depict them. I have a habit of not forgetting a face that I have studied. Sometimes, if I happen to be shy on an expression that I want, I visit the rogues' gallery. Possibly that explains the present circumstances."

"It might." Jimmie the Dip was entirely self-possessed. "Did you get the name as well as the face when you copped mine?" he asked.

"More than likely I paid no attention to the name."

"I'm called—down there—'Jimmie the Dip'."

Moreau did not appear to be interested. He accepted the information as if he had not heard it. But he cast an appreciative glance toward the "Juno" and remarked:

"You came here to find out something in connection with 'Juno,' eh? The address of the model, perhaps. I might give it to you if you told me exactly why you happen to want it. Only—and don't forget that I am a close observer of faces—it would have to be the truth."

Jimmie leaned back in his chair, squinting his eyes while he fastened them upon the unfinished painting. Then he thrust a hand into one of his pockets and brought forth a half-dollar, which he balanced upon the second joint of his flexed index finger, with the end of his thumb caught underneath it.

"Tails," he said, and flipped the coin into the air.

It fell to the floor between them. Moreau peered at it and smiled broadly.

"Tails it is," he announced. "Well, Jimmie the Dip, what about it?"

"That means, Mr. Artist, that I'm going to give you the straight truth about my coming here to see you—on one condition: That you don't put any of the bulls down at headquarters wise to to-day's proceedings. What's the answer?"

"You're on. Go ahead—if you think you can trust me. Otherwise—" He jerked his thumb toward the door. Jimmie replied without hesitation:

"I don't know just why, Mr. Moreau, but I'd take your word for any agreement you would make. I'm something of an observer myself. So here's the yarn. I suppose you read the papers this morning, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"So did I. One of them. What I saw there put me wise to a few things that happened last night. Mr. Moreau, did you ever hear of a man named Crewe and of his place below Washington Square?"

"Yes—to both questions."

"I was there last night. G. Mortimer Branton blew in and chewed the rag with Crewe. Then he drifted. As he was going out, Shannon's Jess, your model for the 'Juno,' jumped into the spot-light. Wait a minute right here. I want to say that Jess is on the level now and living straight. I'm mighty glad that she is making an honest living, and I wouldn't say a word against her for old G. M. B.'s bank-roll. Get me? This isn't any game of 'knock' so far as Jess is concerned."

"Yes, I understand."

"She talked Crewe's ear off, too. Then Holderness came in. You don't know him, of course. For your enlightenment I'll say that he's a crooked cop. He could give me cards and spades and big and little casino and I wouldn't have a look-in at that. Whether he was mixed

up in the general confab, I don't know. Anyhow, Jess beat it as soon as he showed up and wigwagged me for a talkfest as she went out. Does this interest you, Mr. Moreau?"

"It does; very much indeed."

"If you can tell me why I am giving it up to you, I'll buy. However—"

"I expect that you have been puzzled since then, and wanted a confidant."

"Possibly. I'm not much given over to confidences, just the same. I took Jess to the car. She gave me a song and dance about a friend of hers who lost a sparkler—that means a diamond—two days ago, and she wanted to know about the people who were working with me at that time. You see, she seemed to think that two of them had been in the neighborhood she was curious about. Got that?"

"Very clearly. Yes."

"I don't suppose I would have thought any more about it, even after reading the paper this morning, if Crewe hadn't butted in, too, after he closed up. But it was plain that he wanted to know what Jess was after and that I told him something that satisfied him. I couldn't guess what it was—until I saw the paper this morning."

"Then you understood, did you?" Moreau asked.

"Well, you can call it that. I'd put it the other way around. But I could see the direction in which the weather-vane was pointing. Now, Mr. Moreau, it is plain that Jess and Crewe were both after something that I knew and that I didn't know I knew, and don't know yet that I know. That statement is a little bit Irish, but it is middling clear at that. Jess forgot to tell me where she is living now. I came here to try to dig her address out of you. I found that a can of yegg-

man's soup wouldn't open you up unless you wanted to be opened. But I would like to hold a séance with Jess, if you'll give me her address. That's the whole tale."

"Oh, no, it isn't."

"It's all that would interest you."

"Indeed, it is not. Why not tell me the whole story, since you have related part of it?"

Jimmie was silent.

"Have you an idea that you can do something to assist in the search for Miss Branton?" Moreau asked him.

"I don't know. That's what I want to find out. Jess seems to think I can. Crewe appears to have the same hunch. I don't see it myself, but you can bet your sweet life that I want to see it badly if it's so."

"Why?"

"Look here, Mr. Moreau. I'm a crook. You're on the level. I've got a prison record and I'm what you called me by implication a little while ago—a thief. You are a gentleman. But I'll tell you this much: Old man Branton's appearance at Crewe's last night and the actions of the three others I have named afterward indicate very plainly to me that there's a big bank-roll somewhere in this business, and I want my slice of it."

Jimmie leaned forward and gazed at Moreau earnestly.

"If I can help to find Miss Branton I want to do it with my eyes open, and I don't want to be led to it blindfolded. I won't drink when I get to the trough in that case. I had four people with me that day. It's a horsehair-riata cinch that one or two of them know *something* that Jess and Crewe want to find out."

Moreau nodded. "Go on," he said.

"Well, if any one of that bunch did know anything it was Spread-Eagle, or Peter the Con. If they did

know anything about Miss Branton that day that would be of value to anybody, now, I am the guy that can find it out."

"Why don't you do it, then?"

"That is precisely what I am coming to."

"Well?"

"If Peter the Con does know anything, *I* happen to know that there are only two living humans on earth who can get it out of him."

"And you are one of them, I suppose?"

"I am one of them."

"Who is the other one?"

"You don't really expect me to answer that question, do you, Mr. Moreau?"

"It isn't really necessary that you should do so, is it?" the artist replied by asking another question. "It would seem to me that you have already replied to it. According to your own statement it must be the man who was with him that day. What is his name? Remember, I can easily find out if you decline to tell me."

"He's got a list of names as long as your arm, Mr. Moreau," Jimmie replied, smiling. "Say, you're a wise guy all right. Things don't get past you on the gallop. I am doing some swift thinking right now, while I keep my mouth going, and—well, I'll play this game exactly as I started it when I flipped that coin; cards face up, on the table."

"That is the best way—with me, Jimmie," Moreau replied quietly.

"Very well. We call him 'Spread-Eagle.' Never mind why. That isn't important. You'll understand the title if you ever happen to get up against him."

"Good. Now let me see if I understand the situation. According to your deductions, Ethel Branton, on the afternoon of her disappearance, was probably seen and

recognized by one or more of your associates. Following your line of thought, Jess, Crewe, and others believe that they might have seen something, or have known something which would help to explain the mystery. They may even have seen and recognized the abductors, if there were any. You believe, from what Jess said to you, that Peter the Con and Spread-Eagle might be able to give us valuable information if they could be prevailed upon to do so, and you feel sure that you are the only person who can make them tell what they know. That is the size of the matter, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Why did you want to see Shannon's Jess about it?"

"Because I want my rake-off in the bank-roll—if there is one."

"And you think that she can arrange it for you?"

"That's how it looks to me, Mr. Moreau."

"Very good. She is here, now. She has been here all the time. She has overheard this entire conversation. If you'll take the trouble to turn your head, Jimmie, you will see her. So I think I will leave the room while you two talk it over."

CHAPTER XXV

THE SPIRAL STAIRCASE

"HELLO, Jimmie," Jess said when the pickpocket turned to face her. "I was posing when you rapped at the door." She pointed toward the unfinished painting. "I went into the dressing-room and changed while you were giving your life's history. My! but you're easy. Going, Mr. Moreau? You needn't. I know Spread-Eagle a lot better'n Jimmie does. He is probably at my flat right now, waiting for me."

"At your flat," Jimmie murmured. 'How would he know where to find it, Jess?"

"I sent Rat after him. Say, Jimmie, what's your hunch, anyhow? Where is the nigger located in this fence? What could the Con and Spread-Eagle know that would be worth knowing?"

"One, two, three," Jimmie said, smiling back at her and ticking the questions off on his fingers as she asked them. Then they heard the studio door open and close, and perceived that Moreau had left the room. "This looks to me like a blind alley, Jess—and I'm from Missouri; so, mind your step, when you're getting off."

"Well, what do you want of me—that you ain't got already?"

"Two things, Jess; and I'll trade even."

"What are they?"

"You tell me what it was that those two guys might have known about that disappearing act, and I'll be able to guess pretty close to how and why they knew it.

That's one. You put me wise to the graft in this thing, and what my share will be, and I'll turn to and help and work under your orders to the end. That's two. You give up and I'll give up. It's an even trade. Take it or leave it; only, if you leave it, I'll work alone. Or—I'll make a trade with Crewe. What's the answer?"

"The answer?" Jess laughed aloud. Then she crossed to the door and paused with one hand resting on the knob. "The answer is—go and see Crewe."

She opened the door, paused on the threshold long enough to utter another laugh, and went outside, closing it after her. Jimmie shrugged his shoulders, lighted a fresh cigarette, stepped to a mirror to put two or three deft touches to his tie, and addressed his own reflection in these words:

"Stung, Jimmie; stung! You have told something else that you didn't know you were giving up, and the devil of it is you don't know just what it was."

The door opened again and Moreau reëntered the studio. He paused just inside of the room and gazed intently into Jimmie's eyes; and the look was returned as calmly as his own.

"Jimmie," he said, "when you get it out of your nut that you can serve two masters at the same time, and equally well, it is possible that you might get a look-in at that imaginary bank-roll that you have been talking about. For it is imaginary—up to the present moment."

"What do you mean by two masters?" Jimmie asked.

"We will call one of them Common Decency, and the other one Cupidity. The first one stands for the recovery of Ethel Branton; the second one stands for the amount of cash you can make out of the affair without regard to how you get it."

Jimmie nodded understandingly.

"When you have made up your mind that you will do

everything in your power to assist in the search for Miss Branton, without regard to how much or how little you may be paid for it—call on me again," Moreau added, reaching for the knob of the door.

"Wait a minute," said Jimmie. "I don't exactly understand your position in this matter, Mr. Moreau. Maybe, if you would explain that to me—"

"It is very simple. I am Mr. G. Mortimer Branton's friend. I know that Mr. Branton will be extremely liberal with any person who assists him in unraveling the mystery concerning the young woman. That is the entire situation."

"But, what I want to know is, where does my bunch of dips come in?"

"Young man, that is for you to find out. That is precisely what I want to know."

"And I've got to work it blind on that deal?"

"If you work it at all—yes. Did you ever play grab-bag when you were a boy at school? If you did, you know that when you reached into the bag you always got something, even if you hadn't the least idea what you were getting. There is the bag, Jimmie. My advice to you is: Reach inside of it and grab something; and when you have done that, bring it to me."

"It strikes me that I've got to see the bag first."

"The bag is the mob that you had with you that day. There was Peter the Con, Ike the Jew, Spread-Eagle, and yourself. Ike the Jew may know something, but it isn't likely. Spread-Eagle and Peter the Con may have seen something. It looks to me as if your mob is your grab-bag. If that is so, you can't do better than to reach into it."

"Say, Mr. Moreau."

"Well?"

"Was anything lifted from Miss Branton that day she disappeared?"

"That is a foolish question, Jimmie. You forget that the young lady has not been seen since that day. If she lost any article, say, from her mesh-bag that she carried at her wrist, she hasn't been able to tell of it. Possibly that is one of the bits of information you may pull out of the grab-bag."

"I see," Jimmie nodded. "In effect, you're asking me to turn 'bull.'"

"Oh, no, I'm not."

"Stool-pigeon, then."

"Nor that either."

Jimmie crossed to the door. He paused there for an instant as if to say something more, thought better of it, said "Good-by, sir," and passed outside.

Moreau shrugged his shoulders, then listened until the clang of the gate at the elevator told him that Jimmie the Dip had descended the shaft.

Then he locked the studio door and passed into his own sleeping-room, where he pressed a concealed button in the wainscoting and waited. In another moment a closet door opened, and Feltner, his valet, stepped into the room.

But the momentary opening of that closet door disclosed a spiral staircase by which Feltner had descended from a room above. When the door was closed again it was discovered that there was no knob nor latch upon it, and it presented the suggestion of being nailed up and useless.

"Going, sir?" Feltner inquired.

"Yes. And the time of my return is uncertain. Mr. Branton will probably call me on the telephone, but I have already instructed you how to reply to him. Miss Stacey will doubtless do the same, but you know how to

reply to her. Follow your general instructions, and do not fail to keep me informed of the slightest detail that is brought to your notice. Stay in your room overhead and stick close to the telephone. You may go back now."

Moreau waited until Feltner had disappeared up the spiral staircase and the closet door was closed as before.

But, in something like half an hour later, he stepped into the corridor of the building through another doorway than that one which gave upon his studio, and walked swiftly toward the stairway. For some reason he chose to walk down the many flights of stairs, and, whenever necessary, to linger upon one of them until the elevator in ascending or descending had passed.

Ten minutes later Detective Holderness entered the building at the Blank Street door, and, greatly to his astonishment, came face to face with no less a person than Crewe.

"Hello, Crewe!" he exclaimed; and when Crewe nodded in reply and would have passed on the officer stepped directly in front of him and demanded: "What are you doin' up here?"

"Me?" Crewe replied. "Oh, I've been getting in a ton of coal for the Prince of Wales."

"Aw, what's the matter with you? You've been to see that artist, haven't you?"

"No, Holdy, I've been calling upon the Queen of Sheba. So-long. See you later."

Holderness stood still until Crewe had passed out of sight around the corner. Then, without putting his thoughts into words—all of them would have been interrogation points—he ascended by the elevator and presently rapped lustily upon the door of Moreau's studio.

Receiving no reply after continued rapping, and feeling certain that the artist was there, nevertheless, he

descended to the ground floor and entered a telephone booth; and when he issued from it a few moments later he was shaking his head and muttering:

"He is there all right, and, of course, he saw Crewe, although he denies it. This thing is getting mightily mixed up. What I'd like to know is: What did Crewe want with him, and what the devil did the skipper mean, givin' me that steer to go an' see him? An' Crewe ain't given to bein' out in the streets at this time of day—not so very much. Anyhow, I'll have it out with Crewe this night or I'll bust a rib tryin' it on!"

(It is given only to us to know that it was Feltner, not the artist, who answered Holderness at the telephone.)

CHAPTER XXVI

THE COMING OF SPREAD-EAGLE

Crewe entered his place that afternoon, much earlier than was his habit. The knowing ones who saw him come in raised their heads, nodded a recognition—and wondered what might be "doing."

The "morning" bartender had just gone off duty. Christy, Crewe's trusted assistant and manager, was still adjusting his apron when the master appeared, but at a sign from the boss he removed it, donned his street coat, and picked up his hat.

Crewe took a pad of paper from a drawer behind the bar and wrote rapidly upon it with a pencil while Christy stood beside him watching what was written. No words were exchanged between them in the beginning. The penciled words and signs on the paper sufficed for the instructions that Christy received. He nodded his head several times while it was being done. At the end Crewe tore up what he had written and disposed of the scraps somewhere behind the bar. Then, in a low tone, he said:

"Find all three of them, if you can. Steer them over here, if you can. And get back as soon as possible with that information." Then, as Christy was about to go: "I see the Bantam is here. He's a 'squealer.' How did you happen to let him stay?"

"Oh, I thought I'd leave you to deal with him. He said he wanted to see you. He says that Spread is lookin' for him with a gun, an' he wanted to see you first."

"All right. I'm rather glad that you let him wait. Beat it now, Christy."

The young man to whom they had referred, called the Bantam, got up from one of the tables and approached the bar as Christy went out.

"Will you give me a drink, Crewe?" the man asked pleadingly. "I'm all in, and I'm half sick, too. I only left the island at one o'clock. I'm stone broke, too."

"Didn't Christy give you one?" Crewe asked.

"Yes. But I'd like another if you'll let me have it. I'm no souse; you know that."

Crewe put out the bottle and glasses, and he considerately turned his back while the man helped himself to the liquor.

"Beat it now, Bantam," he said when he turned about again to remove the bottle from the bar. "You're not wanted here. You know that. Your sort ain't welcome in this joint. Didn't Christy tell you that?"

"Yes. I told him I wanted to stay to see you a minute, and he said I could."

Crewe made no reply to that appeal. He spread out his hands against the inner side of the bar in his favorite attitude and waited.

"Say, Crewe, don't turn me down," the Bantam pleaded. "Them bulls pounded it outa me an' wheedled it outa me an' doped it outa me, too. I didn't know what I was saying, an' I don't believe now that I said half of what they said I did. On the level I don't. I ain't no squealer. I never was accused of it before."

"What did you want to see me about?" Crewe asked, without making any comment on the statement of the other man.

"That. Just that. I ain't got any other place to go but here, and I'm flat broke. I haven't got a soo-markee,

and if I should try any of my flights* before I'm more to the good than I am now, I'd be pinched before I could step onto the ledge."

"You was wanting me to stake you, wasn't you?" Crewe asked, without a change of expression.

"I was hoping you would see it that way, Crewe."

The blemish-faced proprietor peeled two tens from a roll that he took from his pocket and laid them upon the bar.

"The fact remains," he said while Bantam reached out for the money, "that three good men were sent away for something they didn't do, because of your day-dreams with Marline and Baxter down at headquarters. If it was anybody else but those two I'd say that you're lyin' to me now; as it is, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt, for even now I'd trust you further'n I would them. But all the same you're little Mr. Inbad down here, and you'd better duck. You know the way out. You can come back if you want to when that same three says so."

Bantam turned reluctantly toward the door. He had the air and attitude of one who is being driven from the only home he knows. There was dejection in the slope of his shoulders, in the way his head hung forward, in the way he lifted his feet and put them down again. . . . At the third step he took Crewe spoke to him again, and he stopped.

"Who came off'n the island with you, Bantam—anybody in particular?"

"Nope," Bantam replied, turning half around and resting one hand on the bar. "A bunch of ten-day bums, a couple of wife-beaters, 'n' a dope-fiend. That's all."

"You've been gone six months, haven't you?"

"Uh-huh. Six hells they were, too. I'd about as soon go up the river f'r six years. Say, Crewe, won't you let

* Second-story and parlor-window burglaries.

me stay? I'm scared to death of runnin' into Holderness, 'r Baxter, 'r Marline, before I get my legs in-under me. I'd feel safe if I was settin' around here in your place. An', besides, if I could see Jimmie the Dip he'd let me bunk in with him for a while. He's sure to blow in here to-night, ain't he?"

Crewe nodded. "All right," he said. "I'll stretch the rule a little this once. No more booze, though. You have had enough."

A single gleam, like a ray of sunlight, shot into the face of the man. He uttered an involuntary sigh of great relief. Then he glided back to the table where he had been seated at the time of Crewe's entrance, and a flush of relaxation and contentment stole slowly into his hard face. At that moment, crook though he was, he would cheerfully have given up his life to the man who had befriended him; and Crewe knew it.

Crewe waited for a time, attending to other customers as they appeared, speaking confidentially to many of them, partly ignoring others; but at last he signaled with a mere lift of his chin, and Bantam rose quickly and approached the bar again.

"Have you seen Spread-Eagle?" Crewe asked without preface.

The Bantam shook his head and turned a shade paler, for Spread-Eagle happened to be one of the three whom he was thought to have betrayed and to whom Crewe had referred in their previous talk.

"He's sore, of course, Crewe," he said, "and I don't blame him. But, on the level—"

"Never mind that. You told Christy that he is looking for you. Is that why you're afraid to be seen outside?"

Bantam nodded again. "So long as he thinks I double-crossed him he'll—well, you know what he'll do if

he gets a chance. That's why, more than for any other reason, I wanted to hang around here. If I've got to see him, I'd rather see him here for the first time."

Crewe pulled out a drawer at the back of the bar, glanced at a list of names that was there, and turned back again.

"He hasn't been here," he said. "Who'd he pal with before you went away—anybody?"

"Nope. He never does. He's too high an' mighty. Spread had ought 'a' been a college professor 'r a minister of the gospel with all them 'better'n thou' ways of his'n. And he's meaner'n pussley, at that—'specially where women are concerned."

"What do you mean by that, Bantam?" Crewe asked with careful deliberation.

"I mean just what I say. If I'd wanted to double-cross the Spread I could 'a' done it a heap sight more to the good than what they said I did. Just you let me git a chance to see him down here, where he won't dare to make any breaks at me, an' I'll tell him a thing 'r two that'll make him set up an' take notice. I'm a dip, the same as he is—or as Jimmie is, for that matter—and I work parlor windows and second stories, an' I've yegged an' wire-tapped an' played the con game, an' even gone through drunks on the sidewalks; but I ain't never yet went back on a woman or double-crossed one, or been the means of makin' a crook or a moll out of a good one."

"Has he done that? Has Spread done the last thing you said, Bantam? Don't lie to me!"

"Surest thing you know, Crewe. Look at Polly. One of the best girls ever. He made a crook out of her, didn't he? I just heard to-day that she is dead. Well, she'd be alive right now if it wasn't for him."

"How do you know that?"

"Because I do know it. That's reason enough. Because I loved her myself, and when I asked her to marry me she said she loved him. And after that I took to watchin' him. And when I thought I'd found out something, I put her wise to it, and she did the watchin' for herself after that."

"Was there another girl?"

"Uh-huh!"

"Who was she?"

"I dunno. One of them plutocrats with long bankrolls. That's the class he traveled with before he was a crook. He wanted to git back into it, I guess. I pointed her out to Polly one day. Then I dropped out of the game, for good."

"Did she like him—that other girl? Did she like Spread?"

"Yes—about as much as you 'n' me like a stool-pigeon."

"Didn't you ever hear her name mentioned?"

"Nope. But you ask the Con—Polly's brother. He can tell you, if he will. He oughta be croaked, that guy had. Oh, I hate that whole bunch—Spread, Ikey, and the Con. But, all the same, I didn't squeal on 'em, at that—and I wouldn't. But they're the limit. Why, say, Crewe, them three guys are low-down mean enough to play the cadet act if there wasn't any 'leathers' layin' around to collect."

Crewe's eyes lighted up with sudden comprehension of what he had heard Bantam tell. The "plutocrat girl with the long bankroll" might have been Ethel Branton. Spread-Eagle had "trave[illegible] in her class before he was a crook." The three—I[illegible] Jew, Peter the Con, and [illegible]read—were mean [illegible] to do anything. All three [illegible]hem had been inv[illegible]nce the morning of the day [illegible] Ethel Branton [illegible]eared.

"You say that you watched Spread and saw him meet the other girl, and that then you put Polly wise," he said to the Bantam. "Where did you see him meet her?"

"Oh, in lots of places. He'd lay for her on the avenue or outside of a store where she went to buy books or candy, or up to the Museum of Art, or anywhere she happened to go. She usually turned him down hard, but sometimes she'd let him talk to her. I sized it up that she knew him for what he was, all right."

Crewe's lips parted in the act of beginning some further remark on the subject, but the front door opened at that instant and a man stepped inside, closed it after him, and stopped.

The man was Spread-Eagle.

His eyes swept the entire room with lightninglike comprehension until they rested upon the Bantam who stood leaning against the bar, facing Crewe.

Then, with a wicked little smile on his lips, which did not show in his eyes, for they were narrowed to pinpoints, he took three steps forward, reaching behind him for a weapon as he did so.

Crewe, behind the bar, saw and realized the danger.

He knew what would happen unless he interfered, and with that wonderful agility which he sometimes showed, he vaulted the bar and alighted directly in front of the Bantam and facing Spread-Eagle.

"Get behind me, Bantam," he ordered, even before his feet touched the floor.

Spread-Eagle did not draw the weapon his hand had sought. He stopped, stock-still, waiting, as if for another opportunity.

The front door had opened again, just a little way, and so silently that barely an occupant of the place saw it, so intent were one and all upon the scene in front of the bar. It had opened as soon as Spread-Eagle closed

it, and through the narrow aperture the slim, wizened, and wiry figure of a youth glided into view and reclosed the door again, as softly, after him. It was that same young person who had been seated on the park wall, idly watching Ethel Branton, without knowing in the least who she was, when she read and destroyed the letter that had been her undoing. Crewe had vaulted the bar upon the instant that Spread-Eagle appeared and reached for his gun. He alighted before the weapon could be drawn —but there was not a man in that room who did not thoroughly understand what the Spread's attitude and motions had portended.

The Bantam crouched behind Crewe, shielded by his larger bulk.

Spread stood at a point half-way between the door and the bar, with his right hand behind him, with his body bent a trifle forward, and with that half-contemptuous smile of intensity still upon his lips. Crewe was between them, facing Spread.

The youth, known there as Rat, was poised silently and expectantly at the door.

Not for one whole second of time did the tableau endure, but even in that brief space it seemed, nevertheless, interminable to many of them who looked on.

Then Crewe acted.

In fact there had been no pause save that necessary one of an infinitesimal instant when Crewe's toes touched the floor in front of the bar—and that was only long enough for his muscles to spring again.

If you have seen a cat leap into the air to strike at a bird you can imagine the unthinkable quickness of it—and Spread-Eagle had as little chance before the incredible swiftness of Crewe as the passing bird might find, if within reach of the cat's claws.

His hands grasped the dip's arms and pinned them

to his sides, and the long, delicate, but marvelously strong fingers closed around Spread's biceps like bands of steel that are gradually made tighter by relentless machinery.

Spread-Eagle writhed and sought to tear himself loose, but it required less than an instant for him to realize that he was as impotent in the grasp of Crewe as if he had sought to stay the plunge of a piston in an engine driven by steam.

The half smile on his face died out; the pupils of his eyes, contracted to pin-points but an instant before, dilated; his own strength and agility for which he had gained some renown and much fear of him in the past, dwindled to nothing. He was utterly helpless in the hands of the man who had seized him, and he knew it. Everybody there knew it, too, and wondered what would happen next.

Spread-Eagle had "queered" himself with Crewe. There was not a man there but knew that fact; and there was not one among them who was not secretly glad of it.

Neither of the two uttered a word—but the eyes of Crewe bored into the eyes of the dip while the latter's arms were brought slowly forward in front of him, and were held there relentlessly. Nor did the muscles of Crewe's fingers cease to contract.

They pinched down harder and harder until Spread's countenance began to show the pain of the pressure, and he writhed—not this time in a fruitless attempt to free himself, but in agony that was gradually giving place to numbness. He was game, though, and would not beg; nor did his eyes once falter in returning the cold stare that Crewe bent upon him. He knew that he was beaten for the moment, but he knew also that he

could wait for the time of reprisal—and he never doubted that that time would come.

Then Crewe spoke to him.

The tone was low, composed, almost placid. The words he uttered were slow and deliberate rather than threatening, and whatever effect they may have had upon the Spread-Eagle—and that was enigmatical—they were soothing to the others who heard. A sigh of general relief from the tension of the moment went the rounds of the barroom.

"Stand very still, now, Spread. The danger signal is up, and you might hurt yourself if you moved."

He released his hold upon Spread's arms, and they fell down helplessly beside the man as if they were benumbed. He reached behind the conquered man, secured the weapon that was there, stripped it of its fangs, and restored it. He patted him gently here and there, found a second weapon and served it as he had done with the other one, and then pushed him gently up against the bar, with his back to it, so that he faced all who were in the room—all of whom were now bending forward eagerly and intently, not to lose a single thing that might be said or done.

Crewe spoke to them. He did not again address the man he had conquered with so little apparent effort.

"This man will no longer find entertainment here," he said slowly. "If he comes here again he will be told to leave; if he does not go he will be put out. No one who is his friend can come here and be mine. If I find that one of you have spoken to him, or given him shelter, or been in any way friendly toward him, that one need not come here any more; he will not be welcome."

Crewe turned his back upon Spread Eagle and passed around the end of the bar. A wave of ill-disguised terror swept for an instant into the dip's eyes, for he

knew only too well—and all too late—what that ostracism would mean to him.

Nowhere in the underworld of New York would he be able to find a friend after that hour. Crewe's words had changed him into a homeless outcast, even among pariahs. The sentence that had been passed upon him was final. The onlookers shuddered. There was not one among them who would not rather have accepted a five-year sentence at Sing Sing than to have heard that one passed upon him.

Spread-Eagle was bewildered.

He opened his mouth to speak, and closed it again with the words he would have said, unuttered. His eyes sought the cartridges which had been taken from his two guns and rested upon them where they laid on the polished bar, but at that instant Crewe swept them into the palm of his hand and put them out of his reach.

Spread with his eyes sought face after face among the customers, but not one of them returned his glance or seemed to see him. He moistened his lips with his tongue and shrugged his wide shoulders in an effort to appear unconcerned.

Rat, from his position at the door, crossed the middle finger of his left hand over the first one and received an almost inperceptible nod in reply from Crewe; then he passed outside.

"Can I speak my little piece now, Crewe?" the Bantam asked. . . . Crewe shook his head negatively.

"No," he said. "You can ask the boys what they'll have, and serve them if you want to. No drinks over the bar on this round."

Again there was silence while the Bantam passed from table to table. Then:

"Maybe you think that this ends it, Crewe," Spread-Eagle said.

He had found his voice at last. He spoke without emotion; for, in spite of all, he had courage. Crewe did not appear to have heard him.

"It doesn't end it, not by several damsites!" he added. "I'll find a way to get you somehow, Crewe, and I think I know how it can be done, too."

"Open the front door, Rickett!" Crewe called out to a man who was nearest to it. "Leave it open. That's right. Now—"

Crewe reached under the bar, brought out a siphon of seltzer, and shot the sizzling fluid straight into Spread-Eagle's face, drenching him; and the man staggered back, livid with rage, and stood for a moment a few feet away from the bar, trembling with the utter impotency of his anger.

Crewe raised the siphon again, but Spread-Eagle turned on his heel and passed to the street; and Rickett, who had opened the door for him, closed it after him.

It was a noticeable fact, too, that not a comment was made by those who remained, nor was there so much as a smile anywhere to be seen upon any face that was there. Spread-Eagle's name would never again be mentioned at Crewe's, not even in whispers, such was his rule and sway over them all.

Crewe called the Bantam again to the bar after scribbling an address upon a pad of paper, which he showed for an instant and then destroyed.

"You'll find Jimmie there about now," he said. "Tell him I want him."

When the Bantam had gone out he called to Rickett, familiarly known as Bobcat, because of the shape of his ears at the tops.

"I'll need you to-night when we close up, and the best and lightest tools you've got. Be in your own room at one-thirty, and beat it out of here now," he ordered.

CHAPTER XXVII

SPREAD-EAGLE HAS A HUNCH

SPREAD-EAGLE was driven from Crewe's place into the street, just at nightfall. . . . Across the way, in the shadow of a doorway, his sharpened glances fell upon the figure of a lad.

"Rat again," he said under his breath. "He has been trailing me, too. Maybe that half-guess of mine is a good one, after all. If it is I'll mighty soon find a way to squeeze it out of that young imp."

He started across the street with sudden decision. Rat, quite as abruptly, decided that he had business elsewhere.

"Here, Rat! You come back here or I'll croak you!" Spread called after him; and Rat obeyed. Experience had taught him to know when a threat was the real thing. He was not at all sure that Spread did not have another gun on him. But he shut his lips tightly together, resolved not to talk unless he had to.

"You've been trailing me, Rat, since yesterday, when you found me and told me that Jess wanted to see me," Spread said, seizing the lad's arm and forcing him backward into the doorway from which he sought to escape. "What's the answer, Rat? You've got to tell me."

Rat made no reply.

His eyes, gazing stolidly into Spread's, had the expression of a stubborn spaniel. Spread laughed low, without mirth, wickedly, and with menace.

"Trying to obey instructions not to speak to me, are

you?" he said. "It won't work, kid. Not with me, in my present mood. You talk, or I'll fix you so you can't. See? What did Jess want?"

"Aw, how do I know what she wanted? She told me to find you an' tell you that she wanted to see you. I ain't her confessor."

"Well, you can take me to her now; and that is what you will do."

"That's what I won't do, not if you croak me," Rat retorted stubbornly. "Not after what was said in there. Not till she's put wise to it. I ain't goin' to get *her* in bad with Crewe."

"Crewe had it in for me, didn't he?" Spread asked, changing the subject. "What was that for? You know—or you can guess. You waited outside to take my trail, because he passed a nod to you. Open up, Rat."

"Aw, get away from the noise, Spread. I ain't sound-proof. It ain't you I wanta see. It's the Con."

"The Con! What do you want with Peter the Con?" Spread bent nearer and his grip on Rat's arm tightened so that the lad winced.

"That's my business; it ain't none of yourn. I wanta see him; that's enough," Rat answered.

Spread was silent for a moment. Then: "When did you last see him, Rat?"

"Three days ago. What's that got to do with it?"

"Where did you see him?"

"Aw, he was takin' the 'Statue of Liberty' up to the Hippodrome, 'r mebby he was paintin' the roof of the Woolworth Buildin'; I don't seem to remember which it was."

"Where did you see Peter the Con, three days ago, Rat?"

The question was very slow, very deliberate, and Rat

thoroughly appreciated the menace that was behind it. Nevertheless he dodged it deftly—by telling enough of the truth to deceive Spread in case the latter should really know. At least, that was his idea.

"He was talkin' to a skoit, if you must know. She was a peach, too. He passed her a letter, an' she handed him a smack on the jaw f'r doin' it. Then he ducked, an' she tore up the letter; an' I was so interested in watchin' her that I let him get away from me—an' me a watchin' him f'r two days."

"What were you watching him for? You had best tell me the truth about it, Rat, or you will wish that you had."

"Because he pinched one of Jess's sparklers off'n me that I was takin' to the joolers to get fixed for her. An' I ain't dast say a word to Jess about it till I found out where he'd hocked it, so's I could go an' git it back f'r her. That's the hull layout, an' you c'n take it 'r leave it. I want that sparkler back, an' I'm goin' to get it if I have to croak the Con to do it. See? An' he up an' went under cover from that minute when I saw him give the letter to the skoit. Say, Spread, I'll trade even. You tell me where I c'n find the Con an' I'll give you Jess's number, so's you c'n go there an' see her by your own lonesome."

"And then you would hike to a telephone and put Jess wise to what has happened at Crewe's," the Spread replied, purposely leading Rat on.

"Well, that wouldn't interefere with your goin' there, would it?"

"Who was the girl to whom the Con passed the letter?"

"Soich me!"

"Don't you know?"

"Nope; an' I don't care, neither."

"I thought that possibly, since you did not follow the Con, you might have kept an eye on her. Did you?"

"Me? On her? Not so's you could notice it. She wasn't in my class, or the Con's, either. She was a swell skoit that some rich guy was tryin' to do, I guess, an' the Con was pickin' up an extra tenner, mebby, f'r bein' messenger. That's the way I sized it."

"Where did it happen, Rat?"

"Oh, up the avenue, near the park."

"Did you tell Jess about it? Or Crewe?"

"An' give the snap away about the sparkler I lost? Not yet I ain't. But I'll have to if I don't get that shiner back."

Spread-Eagle was thinking quickly and intently, and the burden of his thought was that on no account should he permit Rat to return to Crewe or to Jess until he had had time to mature some plans for his own future procedure—if, indeed, it should ever be permitted.

"You're on, Rat," he said. He took a card from one of his pockets and wrote rapidly on the back of it. Then he mentioned an address.

"That is where you will find the Con," he added. Then he tore the card in half, giving first one part of it, and then the remaining one to Rat.

"Hand him half of this at a time," he said in conclusion. "He will put them together and read what I have written. And he will give you the stone. If he has already shoved it, he will get it out for you. And here is a dollar for you. Now, where will I find Jess?"

Rat told him Jess's new address, far uptown, for she had long since gone from the neighborhood of Stuyvesant Square.

"Gee, but that was easy!" he told himself as he watched Spread hurry away through the darkness. Then he added slyly, under his breath:

"Spread'll just about wait around the corner long enough to see if I nibble that bait of his, an' it's up to me to make him think I've done it. But, gee! if I should bite—*good night!*"

Nevertheless Rat remained where he was, for a time, absorbed in thought and with his hands thrust deep in his pockets. There were several things about the occurrences of that afternoon and evening which he did not in the least understand—and which therefore interested him.

The card to Peter the Con which Spread had given him—torn in half—was not among the puzzling things. He knew as well as if Spread had told him that the card in two parts meant something that would not be healthy for himself when he should deliver it. In fact, Rat guessed exactly what it did mean, and he had not the slightest doubt that if he were fool enough to deliver the card he would be detained himself. Spread did not mean that Rat should return to Crewe that night.

Standing there lost in thought, idly fingering the several articles in his pockets, he was suddenly conscious that his right hand clutched something that he had entirely forgotten—or neglected.

It was a tightly rolled piece of brown paper, and inside of that roll were the torn fragments—the particles of what he supposed to be a love-letter—which he had rescued from the gutter in Fifth Avenue at the time when he had been trailing the Con to recover the "shiner" that belonged to Jess—the very message which he had seen Peter the Con give to the "skoit" after she descended the steps from her Fifth Avenue home.

"Jingo!" he exclaimed under his breath; and for a moment he stood quite still and rigid.

"Say!" he muttered, addressing himself. "Whadda-you know about that! An' Spread puttin' the gimlet

into me about that goil—and wantin' to know if I followed either of them that day. There's one thing that ain't no idle dream, and that is, if Spread *is* goin' to see Jess, I've gotta beat him to it."

If Rat had been nicknamed "The Fly," the name would have been even more appropriate than the one that had been given him—such was his alert quickness when he decided to act. He was off on the instant, and in a surprisingly short time, considering the distance he had to cover, he dashed breathlessly into the parlor of Jess's flat—to find that she had just put on her hat preparatory to going out.

"Say, Jess," he began gaspingly, "I ain't got no time to go into particulars. I got to beat it out of here. Spread's comin'. I gotta hunch he's goin' to bring Jimmie with him, but I dunno. Now, you take this and listen to me!"

He put the roll of brown paper, with its contents, into her hand, and then, as rapidly as he could talk, told her everything that he knew concerning it, and Jess listened with widening eyes. She knew, from the very commencement of Rat's story that it was the key to the disappearance of Ethel Branton.

If Rat saw Peter the Con deliver a letter to Ethel Branton when she descended the steps from her home that day, it followed that there could be but one person for whom the Con would perform that service—Spread.

Instantly the whole situation was made clear to her. It had been Spread-Eagle, assisted by Peter the Con and Ikey the Jew, who had abducted Ethel Branton—Spread-Eagle who, by some means, fair or foul, had succeeded in inducing her willingly to enter a taxicab near one of the entrances to the Museum of Art—Spread-Eagle and his two conscienceless followers who were now detaining her.

Jess barely listened to the short and swift account that Rat gave her of the incidents that had happened so recently at Crewe's, when the Spread had been so irrevocably turned down by the saloon-keeper. She gave little heed to him when, having finished all that he had to say, Rat darted to the door and turned there to deliver his last word about it.

"Jess," he said, still breathlessly, for he was in mortal terror lest Spread should put in an appearance before he could escape, "I'm goin' to this here place where the Spread says the Con is stayin'. But I ain't goin' to deliver that torn card. Not on y'r life. The Con or Ikey would croak me, sure. But I'm goin' to hang around outside and keep my eyes peeled. That's what. You've got the number, ain't you?"

"Yes. Go there, Rat. Keep watch. Keep out of sight. I must find Mr. Moreau—and, I think, Crewe, also. We'll show up down there before very long. Beat it, kid."

Rat disappeared. Jess flew to the telephone.

She called Birge Moreau's number and received an immediate response—in a voice which she thoroughly believed to be the artist's.

It was Feltner's, of course, for Feltner had had three years of training to imitate his master's voice over the phone for just such occasions; Feltner, the valet, in the hidden room under the roof of the tall building in Blank Street—in the secret room at the top of the spiral staircase which connected with the sleeping-room of Birge Moreau.

Briefly, Jess recounted the main features of Rat's disjointed tale.

"It's nine o'clock now," she concluded. "How soon will I see you? Will you come here or shall I go to you?"

"Wait there where you are until you hear from me,"

came the reply. "I will telephone to you as soon as I have determined upon the best course to pursue."

This sounded a trifle strange to Jess, and she responded:

"I hardly expected you to be lukewarm in this matter, Mr. Moreau. Anyhow, I'm going to phone to Crewe right now and tell him, too," and she hung up the receiver before the man at the other end of the wire could reply. Two minutes later she had Christy, down at Crewe's, on the wire.

"He has gone out, Jess," Christy said in reply to her eager question.

"Christy," she implored, "give it to me straight. This is a matter of life and death—or worse. Crewe is just as interested as I am. I've got what he wants, and I must, *must*, MUST, get it to him without delay."

"Honest to Pete, Jess, I don't know where he's gone. He didn't tell me. He went out with Bobcat Rickett ten minutes before you called up, and that's all I know—except that he sent the Bantam away first with a flea in his ear. Something's doin', but I don't know what it is any more'n you do."

With that Jess had to be satisfied—and she settled herself to await the telephone message from Moreau, or the coming of Spread-Eagle—although she had not now the slightest idea that Spread-Eagle had any notion of calling upon her.

Once she unrolled the paper that Rat had given her and gazed down upon the torn bits that it contained. She had the idea of killing time by piecing them together, but she dismissed it at once. The contents of that letter did not interest her, for the circumstances connected with it told her all that she cared to know just then. It was the letter itself and the manner of its

delivery that were of vital moment—not what the letter might contain.

Ten o'clock came, then eleven—then midnight; and still no word from Moreau.

At twelve-fifteen she called Christy again; but Crewe had not returned, and there had been no word from him.

At twelve-twenty she began pacing up and down the room. She stopped once and thought of calling up the artist again; but she shut her lips tightly together and decided that she would not—and continued her restless pacing.

At twelve-twenty-four she called Christy the third time—and received the same report.

"That settles it," she said aloud as she hung up the receiver. "I'm going over to that place myself. Rat is there, and—well, I'm not afraid of that whole bunch of Spread-Eagle's crooks."

She armed herself and went out into the night.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A GLARING HEAD-LINE

When Spread-Eagle turned the corner after his parting with Rat he encountered two experiences in close succession, either of which would effectually have put that youth out of his mind for the time being.

The first one was that he met Holderness.

News travels apace in the underworld. Holderness had not been near Crewe's since the episode of the seltzer siphon, but nevertheless he had been put wise to it. . . . He had encountered the Bantam five minutes earlier, and the Bantam had told him about it.

So, instead of passing Spread-Eagle with a curt nod, as he otherwise would have done, he stepped directly in front of him and stopped.

"Hello, Spread. Leavin' town?" he asked, with a leer.

Spread-Eagle was in no mood to be interfered with just then. He was desperate. He knew, from the very manner of the question, that Holderness was already informed of all that had happened at Crewe's. He knew, too, that Holderness would take him down to headquarters then and there (he having lost the friendship of Crewe) unless he put up a very considerable sum on the spot, to escape. And Spread-Eagle hated Holderness most cordially—and he was desperate; otherwise he would not have done what he did.

Holderness, receiving no reply, added:

"So Crewe gave you the frosty fist, did he? I guess, maybe, you'd better take a walk with me, Spread."

During those few seconds Spread had been gathering himself for the effort which he knew must be his last—and must therefore be effectual.

It has already been said that he was an athlete, and that he might, with training, have given a good account of himself in the ring. Add to that, his desperate mood, his intense anger, and his utter extremity, and you will get some idea of the forces behind the blow that Holderness received a little to one side of the point of his chin. It was a knockout blow, made doubly effective because Holderness did not in the least anticipate it; and he collapsed like a wet dish-rag; and just at the instant of its delivery Jimmie the Dip stepped out from an adjacent areaway.

His sudden appearance was the second experience referred to—for Spread was really anxious to see Jimmie without delay.

Together they drew the unconscious Holderness into the darkness of the area wherein Jimmie had stepped for a moment until the officer should pass—Jimmie having seen him first—knowing that after a time he would recover consciousness without aid, and realizing that the interval could not be better employed than by Spread in making a getaway. Then Jimmie reached down into one of his own pockets and drew forth a crisp twenty-dollar bill which he placed in the relaxed fingers of the officer.

"He'll think you put it there, Spread," Jimmie said, "and maybe he won't be in a hurry to get on your trail on account of it. I never knew anybody who liked money the way he does. Come on now. We've got to beat it." Then, a moment later, as they hurried together in the direction of the square: "Whatever made you do it, Spread?"

The question, coming as it did, was an inspiration as

well as a revelation to Spread-Eagle. It told him that Jimmie knew nothing of the occurrences at Crewe's, and it inspired him with a crafty plan for keeping Jimmie ignorant of it for the time being.

So he lied quite easily.

"The net is out for both of us, Jimmie," he said. "I just found it out. Holdy and Marline and Baxter, and I don't know how many more, are out scouting for us. That's why I smashed him."

"But what for? I haven't reneged. What's up?"

"Search me. We will have to hunt cover for a while. That's all."

Jimmie came to a stop at the square. Then, with a jerk of his thumb toward the empty benches, he led the way across the street and dropped down upon one of them.

"Now get it off of your chest, Spread," he said. "I want to know what it's all about. Sit down."

"No, I won't sit down. We've got to beat it, Jimmie. Say, Shannon's Jess wants to see me. She has had Rat trailing me. I'm going there to find out what it's all about. You had better come along with me."

"Don't you know what it's about, Spread?"

"No. Do you?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Haven't you read the papers, Spread?"

"No. I haven't had time. I've been out of town since—since I saw you."

"Not yesterday, or to-day, either?"

"I tell you, no. As soon as I got off the boat this afternoon I hiked for Crewe's. He wasn't any too cordial, and—"

"That's funny."

"What is?"

"That Crewe wasn't cordial to you. I should have thought that he would—oh, never mind. So you don't know the latest, eh? and you back in the city thirty hours or more. My, my! Spread, I see Mose Bernstein's taxi over there with the 'vacant' sign on it. I'm going to take you for a ride—and talk to you. But first, before we start, you'd better take a tumble to the little fact that I'm onto your curves that you were trying to put over the plate just now. That wasn't any pinch, my merry jester. You just wanted to get me out of the way before somebody else got to me—and the somebody else was Crewe, or some one that Crewe sent. Now, what's the answer?"

"Aw, come on, Jimmie. We'll take the taxi if you want to. Anything to get away from here. Don't forget that I just handed Holdy a pretty heavy jolt."

"Pooh and piffle and pish, my friend! That twenty that I put in his fist more than compensated. He'd let you smash him again for another ten. Here we are. Harlem, Mose, through the park—and no hurry. Finally, in about an hour, stop at—"

He bent forward and gave the address in a lower tone, adding to Spread as he entered the cab: "That's where Jess lives, since she moved."

Spread was not aware of the fact that, with all his shrewdness and strength of muscle, he was in the hands of a man who was smarter than himself, who had suddenly discovered his possible value, and who intended to make the most of it, no matter what the cost.

"Have you heard that Polly is dead?" was the first question he put to Spread as they rode up Fifth Avenue.

"Yes. I heard it to-day." Spread turned savagely upon Jimmie. "That makes me think of something. What were you and Jess and two or three others nosing

around over there about since she died? The old woman told me."

"Oh! She did, eh? Maybe she told you a lot more besides. Did she, Spread?"

Spread narrowed his eyes and glanced from the corners of them toward his companion.

"You and Polly were pals at one time, Spread," Jimmie went on placidly, but was brought to a sudden stop by the heavy hand that fell upon his knee.

"That will be about all, Jimmie," Spread interrupted. "My private affairs need not interest you."

"They don't—not a hang—coming or going. But Polly knew something that does interest me, and she probably told you—and you, if you know it, are going to tell me—see?"

"Are you plumb crazy, Jimmie? What are you talking about, anyhow?"

"This!"

With a flourish, Jimmie pulled an evening paper from his side pocket and held it near the cab-door so that the street lights shone full upon the glaring head-line that decorated it at the top.

The words across the page were:

ETHEL BRANTON PROBABLY ABDUCTED
BY MEN IN A TAXICAB

Jimmie could see that Spread-Eagle shivered perceptibly while he read the words that were printed in big, black type.

The only thing that Jimmie was positive about was that Spread-Eagle did know *something* in connection with the disappearance of Ethel Branton. Therefore, the sudden exhibition of the head-line of the newspaper.

The almost imperceptible start which Spread gave

when he read the words, the unmistakable shiver of apprehension which followed it, the set muscles of Spread's face, frozen into utter coldness and imperturbability before he turned his head to speak, all confirmed Jimmie in his opinion.

Spread-Eagle's voice was perfectly cool and composed when he spoke. He said:

"Was this girl the great Branton's daughter? Is this the news you referred to?"

"Surest thing you know, Spread," was the reply.

"And you have a notion that Polly knew something that might have explained her disappearance?"

"Crewe had such a notion. Shannon's Jess is itching with the same malady. An artist named Moreau is punching rings in the same merry-go-round, and I'm simply keeping still and letting the elephant walk over me without stepping on me—see?"

"And—you think, do you, that if Polly did know anything about Miss Branton, she would have told me?"

"Yes. That is, she would have told you or the Con—and if she had told him he would have told you. What I think is, that if Polly did know anything you would know it now."

"I quite agree with you, Jimmie. I think so, too. If Polly had known anything, I would know it—now." Spread spoke with deliberation. "All of which proves that Polly did not know anything about Miss Branton that could have explained her disappearance, notwithstanding the united opinions of Crewe and Jess and yourself. Is that quite plain?"

Jimmie nodded.

As a matter of fact, it was much plainer than Spread had intended, for it was apparent that he dodged the issue; that he side-stepped the vital point. Jimmie produced a cigarette from his case and lighted it. Then,

after there had been utter silence between them for some minutes, he had an inspiration.

He had been conscious of the fact that Mose Bernstein's taxi had been followed since the moment it left Washington Square, and he did not believe that Spread had noticed it. He had seen the Bantam lurking in a shadow just before his own meeting with Spread—and now he did not doubt that the Bantam was inside that second taxi, and that he had been sent out by Crewe to shadow Spread-Eagle. Shadowing was one of the Bantam's varied accomplishments.

The inspiration was that he strongly desired an opportunity for a word with the Bantam without the knowledge of Spread-Eagle.

Some minutes later the taxi came to a halt in front of the house where Jess lived.

"Here we are," said Jimmie. "Here is where Jess lives." He opened the door preparatory to descending. Spread sat still.

"I've changed my mind," he said. "I'm not going in to see Jess. You can go in if you like, Jimmie. I'll wait."

"I don't want to see her if you don't," Jimmie replied, leaning back against the cushions.

"Oh, all right! Then you wait here for me. There's a drug-store over there, and I want to telephone."

He sprang from the cab and darted across the street toward the corner, half a block away—and Jimmie, the instant he saw Spread disappear inside the drug-store, jumped out and ran rapidly back toward that other cab in which he believed he would find the Bantam.

He was not mistaken. . . . . And the Bantam would have made his escape had he guessed that Jimmie was "on"—but the knowledge came too late.

"We haven't got but a minute, Bantam," Jimmie said

rapidly. "You beat it down to the corner to that drug-store. Keep yourself out of sight, but manage somehow to see which telephone-booth the Spread has used. As soon as he comes out you slide inside, and get into the same booth—and be quick about it after he leaves it. Say to Central just exactly what I tell you."

"Yes. All right. I'm on," the Bantam replied.

"Say: *'This is Detective Holderness of headquarters. I want the number and the street address of that last call from this booth; and be quick about it.'* Got that, Bantam?"

"Sure!"

"Central will give it to you, all right. As soon as you get it, find Crewe, no matter where he is, and give it to him. Maybe he's at his place; I don't know. Tell him that I'll stick with Spread if it can be done. But I have my doubts. But it's a cinch that the address you get will be mighty warm. Now, beat it!"

He darted back to Mose Bernstein's taxi, and saw with satisfaction that the Bantam arrived at the drug-store in time.

"Not a word, Mose, to the Spread, that I left the cab," he said as he reëntered it.

"You ain't double-crossin' your own pal, are you, Jimmie?" Mose inquired with a wry smile.

"I'm working under Crewe's orders. That ought to be enough for you, Mose," was the short reply.

"It is," said Mose, and was silent.

Then Spread-Eagle returned, and there was an ugly scowl on his face and an angry glitter in his eyes when he resumed his seat beside Jimmie; and he sat perfectly still in utter silence for several moments.

"Where do you want Mose to take us now?" Jimmie asked when he could bear the silence no longer.

"Shut up!" was the surly reply. "Let me think."

Then, after another pause: "What time is it, Jim?"

"Eleven-forty-five," Jimmie replied, glancing at his watch. "Gee, I didn't think we had been that long!"

"Tell Mose to take us downtown," Spread ordered shortly.

"Where to?" Jimmie asked.

"Down-town, I said. Make it Third Avenue and Fourteenth Street."

The cab went slowly by Spread's orders. It was twelve-fifteen when they got down at the corner and entered a saloon.

"You wait for me, Mose," Spread ordered. "I'll want you—maybe for the balance of the night—maybe for to-morrow, too. You had better take half an hour and fill your tanks. Then come back here. Come inside and have a drink first, if you like."

Jimmie adopted a bantering tone when they were inside the place.

"Going automobiling, Spread?" he inquired.

"I'm going to hell before morning; but I'm going to send somebody else there before I start," was the quick reply. "Some people try to know too much, and it isn't always healthy, Jimmie—so don't you try to be one of them. That's the game you have been playing to-night, and you'd better drop it while there is time. When Mose comes back, and I'm ready to start, you've got to beat it in the opposite direction—see?"

"Maybe I'd better beat it now," Jimmie replied angrily, rising from his chair.

Spread shrugged his shoulders. "Do just as you like about that," he said.

For a moment Jimmie the Dip stood silently gazing down upon his former friend and pal; then, without another word, he turned on his heel and went out upon the street.

CHAPTER XXIX

JUST IN TIME

When Jimmie the Dip passed out from O'Keefe's saloon Mose Bernstein had already departed to get the gasoline for the large order that Spread-Eagle had given him.

Nevertheless, in the place where Bernstein's cab had stood, another was in the act of drawing up to the curb, and with some surprise, and not without misgivings, Jimmie recognized the driver of it as the man who had taken the Bantam on his shadowing tour that night. At the same instant the Bantam himself poked his head half-way out at the window, so Jimmie glided swiftly to the cab-door, opened it, and stepped inside.

"Well?" he demanded laconically. "What in blazes are you doing here?"

"Waitin' for you. Saw you go inside. His nibs is over there across the street."

"His nibs—who?"

"Crewe."

"You have seen him?"

"Just left him. He told me before I started out tonight where I could find him at different hours."

"Then I'd best go over there right now and see him."

"Wait a minute. Your game is to go back to Spread and stick to him, Jimmie."

"Can't. We have quarreled."

"Well, go back and make it up. Tell him that you're sorry."

"I'll see Crewe first, anyhow. Spread is good for a half-hour or more. Mose has gone to fill his tanks, and Spread won't stir out till he gets back."

Jimmie let himself out at the opposite door and crossed the street hastily to the saloon on the southeast corner, which was the one that Bantam had indicated.

In the back room he found Crewe. The latter had just turned away from the telephone which he had been using. He greeted Jimmie with a nod, and the dip lost no time in relating everything that had been said and done while he was with Spread-Eagle.

Crewe listened without comment, save to nod with satisfaction two or three times during the recital. At the close of it he said:

"That was a good move of yours, Jimmie, sending the Bantam to get that telephone number and the address. It is only a few blocks below here and over near First Avenue. The only trouble is that it is not *the* number. The telephone is in a saloon, and they had to send out somewhere to get the person that Spread wanted to talk with."

"Well," replied Jimmie, "won't they give it up to you? You're Crewe."

"No. I don't think they would—straight. Anyhow, I don't care to try it that way. Spread is across the street, isn't he?"

"Yes, waiting for the return of Mose Bernstein. And he has ordered Mose's car for the balance of the night and all day to-morrow."

"Which means, doesn't it, that Miss Ethel is still safe?"

Crewe asked the question more of himself than of Jimmie, but Jimmie replied:

"I have my doubts about that, Crewe. However——"

As it happened, they had not long to wait after that.

Twenty minutes later Mose Bernstein's taxi came around the corner at rapid speed, stopped at the door they were watching, and Spread-Eagle sprang down from it and ran into the house so quickly that it was a chance if Rat could get over there soon enough to follow him to the place he was going.

Behind it came the limousine that Crewe had told Jimmie to procure, and Jimmie sprang out at the call of Crewe; then all three of them approached the door of the building that Spread had entered.

But Crewe, ever active, could not await the return of Rat.

Bidding the others wait, he mounted the stairs swiftly, pausing at each landing to listen, placing an ear against each door, one after another, on each of the floors that he passed—and came upon Rat, lying insensible and with an ugly gash on his forehead at the topmost landing of all. Then, just as Crewe bent over him, he straightened again as if from a galvanic shock.

The sharp rattle of an automatic fired four times, and more rapidly than one could count, shook the air and filled the interior of that house with menace and alarm.

An instant more, and just as Crewe jumped forward toward the door from beyond which the reports had come, it was pulled open from the inside, and on the threshold, with a background of utter darkness, Spread-Eagle appeared.

In his arms, and held there by one of them, for the other was more than half free to use, was the insensible form of Ethel Branton. In his right hand he held the automatic pistol that had already been discharged four times—for what reason or purpose Crewe could

not know. He did know, however, that it still held four cartridges.

Crewe leaped forward, and Spread discovered him at that instant; for, although the light in the hallway was dim, one could see objects indistinctly.

For the fraction of an instant Spread halted. A queer smile snarled upon his lips.

"Crewe, by——" he cried out, but his exclamation ended there, even as his automatic pistol was discharged again; for he pitched forward, even as he would have sent a bullet into Crewe; and he and the burden he carried and Crewe himself all went to the floor together.

More than that—as they fell the pistol was discharged yet once again, it would seem by accident, as indeed proved to be the case; and when Crewe got swiftly to his feet Spread-Eagle did not attempt to rise. That last bullet, discharged accidentally, had found lodgment within himself.

He had picked his last pocket, played his last plot. But his eyes were open and he had not lost consciousness.

Rat got slowly to his feet at the same moment. Consciousness had returned to him just in time for him to catch Spread-Eagle's feet and trip him, when Crewe would otherwise have been killed.

Jimmie and Shannon's Jess came running up the stairs at that moment, and Jess, with quick wit, seized the insensible form of Ethel in her strong arms, now gifted with superhuman energy, and darted with her down the stairs again.

"Two—dead ones—in there—Crewe," Spread-Eagle whispered when Crewe bent over him. "Ikey—and Pete. Ethel's—safe. I'm glad. I'm—all—in—Crewe."

And he was.

tried to get a squint at it, but all I could see was them two letters signed to it."

"What about it, Holdy?" Baxter asked.

"Nothin' much; only when he laid the note down he says to me: 'Holderness, you are suspended from duty pending notice of trial on charges that have been made against you. You will be served with a copy of the charges later in the day,' says he. Now, whadda you know about that?"

"Say, Holdy, ain't that artist guy's first name Birge? Ain't his initials B. M.?" Marline asked.

"Sure. An' ain't your first name Ben, and y'r last name Marline? And couldn't you, if you tried, pick out another dozen of B. M.'s right here on the force that'd be a damsite likelier the B. M. than him?" Holderness sneered. "Anyhow, I'm up on charges, an' I'm goin' on a still hunt to find the guy that done it."

CHAPTER XXX

THREE WENT IN—TWO CAME OUT

THE great Branton, and Sterling Vaughan—who was almost as great in his own way, and nearly as powerful in matters financial—frequently lunched together in the privacy of the office of one or the other. Their interests in the large affairs of the financial world were as nearly identical as can be imagined by those who may never hope to approach their altitude; and they found the practice of discussing them informally on such occasions to be mutually and highly advantageous.

The only notification, or summons, or invitation, which ever passed from one to the other for the arrangement of such an event—for their luncheons were certainly eventful to others, as a rule—was a telephonic communication between their secretaries, the which would be duly transmitted to the respective superior, somewhat after the following manner:

"Mr. Branton has telephoned that he will expect you to lunch with him to-day, sir"; or, "Mr. Vaughan has just telephoned that he will take lunch with you to-day, sir"; or vice versa, in either case.

Sometimes it happened that one or the other, or both, felt the need of a longer and more intimate conversation than was convenient at a business office, and on such occasions the luncheon would be partaken at the Homo Sum Club which they both frequented and favored.

One day, when both had lighted their big black cigars and leaned back in their chairs—a day upon which neither had manifested a desire to go deeply into matters financial—Sterling Vaughan remarked, as if quite casually:

"I wish, Mort, that you might be as wise about giving advice in regard to the upbringing of a wayward son, as you are concerning the manipulation of stocks and bonds and industrial enterprises."

"Why not?" Branton rejoined sharply, and as always maintaining the outward appearance of anger, although he was at heart one of the kindest of men. "Why might I not give just as good advice about wayward sons, as about dollars and cents?"

Vaughan smiled somewhat grimly.

"Don is not so great a trial as he is a puzzle," he said, continuing his thought, instead of replying to the question. "I don't know what to do with him; I don't know what I *can* do with him—and I am wise enough to know that his shortcomings, or failures, or lack of those characteristics which I most admire—or however one may please to define my son's present conduct—is due to me. I haven't been strict enough with him; and the devil of it is I can't be."

"I knew pretty well what you were going to say, Sterling," Branton replied. "That is why I answered you as I did. I've got the advice all ready for you; and it's good advice—IF—you'll follow it."

"Follow it! Of course I'll follow it. . . . What is it, Mort?"

"I can sum it up in two words," Branton answered, with a grim smile.

"All right, give it to me."

Branton bent forward in his chair, clasping the arms

of it, while the big black cigar stuck out at an angle from one corner of his mouth, as he replied, sharply:

"*See Crewe.*"

* * *

Birge Moreau halted, looking down upon the light fall of snow that barely covered the concreted sidewalk. In fact, it did not cover it, for there were spaces where it was quite bare. There was enough, however, to reflect and multiply the cold white light of the full moon 'til the glittering winter night was almost as brilliantly illuminated as at noon. Enough, too, to betray to the keen eyes of Moreau certain unexpected lines of footsteps that crossed and recrossed the sidewalk.

"Odd, isn't it, Feltner?" he said, addressing his companion.

"Yes, sir. Quite so," Feltner replied automatically.

He appeared to do and say most things automatically. Moreau, the gifted portrait artist, alone understood that the mechanical attitude of his "man" was a mannerism, or a habit, or whatever term one may apply to it, for, in reality, Feltner's perceptions were extraordinarily keen.

"Three went inside; two came out, Feltner," Moreau remarked in a casual tone which belied the interest he felt in the discovery he had just made, of those tracks in the light fall of snow before the great, padlocked, picket-topped, wrought-iron gate that barred the entrance to the grounds of Vaughan-ton.

"Yes, sir. Quite so," Feltner replied a second time.

"Two were women; one was a man. The women came out; the man remained. The footprints of the three, made when they went inside of the grounds together, are so closely side by side as to suggest that the women were supporting the man in an upright position; eh?"

"Yes, sir. Quite——"

"And when the two women returned, one of them walked in advance of the other, and both were in a hurry. They—one of the three—possessed a key to that padlock, Feltner. It is not the sort of a lock that can be picked open with a bent hairpin," Moreau went on, stepping close to the high gate to examine the object referred to, and then peering between the bars.

He moved backward, away from the gate, and looked along the street toward the direction that the two women had taken—then he stepped to the middle of the thoroughfare, paused there for a moment, and returned again to Feltner.

"Odd; very odd," he murmured, more to himself than to his taciturn valet—for such was Feltner's nominal occupation.

The artist glanced thoughtfully along the street, first in one direction and then the other. Then, again, he went close to the gate and peered between the square, upright bars, following the tracks in the snow until they were lost to sight along the winding, asphalted roadway, which led, finally, as he well knew, beneath the porte cochère of Sterling Vaughan's magnificent and justly celebrated mansion.

"The three drove here together in an automobile which came to a stop in the middle of the street, instead of drawing up at the curb. They got down, and stood waiting until the car was driven onward. Then one of the women—the larger of the two—used the key to unlock the gate. All of that is written down in the snow, Feltner."

"Yes, sir. Quite so."

"Well, go on, Feltner. You have more than those four words in your vocabulary. There are times when it would seem that you are losing the gift of speech

altogether; and then an emergency will arise; and, lo! our gifted ex-Secretary of State fades to a frazzle as compared with your eloquence. Go on, Feltner. What more do you see than I have seen?"

"Nothing more than you have seen, sir; somewhat more than you have yet mentioned."

"Good. Let's have it."

"The two ladies——"

"How do you determine that they were *ladies*, Feltner?"

"By their footprints, sir; and their manner of walking. By their dress, and their upright carriage. A *lady*, sir, is depicted quite as largely by those evidences, as in her speech, and the cadence and modulation of her voice-tones, and in the selection of her words."

"I uncorked you all right that time, didn't I? Go on, Feltner. If you were back in your Latin class at Eton, or Harrow, or wherever it was, your professor would order you to 'Construe.' So—— Well?"

"I think, sir, that the young man was practically helpless——"

"Paralyzed. Soused. Very probably."

"——when he was brought here in the car, sir; and that, sir, would suggest his identity."

"Young Vaughan, of course, Feltner. The place itself, and the key to the padlock would indicate all that."

"Yes, sir. Quite so."

"Here! Don't fall back upon your vernacular. I want the rest of what you were saying."

"The ladies, sir, evidently told the chauffeur of the car to drive on, perhaps to the corner, and wait for them. They went in the same direction we were following, when they came from the house. I think that

we will find that they reëntered the car at the corner, or near there, and were driven away."

"Hmmm," Moreau voiced thoughtfully. "You dodge the issue, Feltner. A village constable might read all of that, in those footprints. The question is: Ought we to swarm over that broken-glass-topped wall—to climb the gate is out of the question—and find out what has become of the young man who was taken inside, and who was not brought out? Eh?"

"I should answer that question in the negative, sir."

"I am inclined to that myself—for reasons of personal comfort, possibly. But, why?"

"Principally, sir, because it is none of our business."

"Correct. And there does not appear to be an adequate reason for making it so. Quite right, Feltner. And you would add, I suppose, 'Also because the companions of the young man were *ladies*'—eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"You cast them as ladies because of the style of their shoes. You dress them in the latest and most expensive gowns, and swathe them in costly furs for the sake of matching the shoes. You deck them with jewelry to preserve the parallel. You stand them erect, and personify their general carriage, to be in keeping with the *tout ensemble*. You create one of them taller than the other, and slightly heavier, although their feet are practically of the same size, and although the length of their strides are about the same, because of the character of their footprints upon this slight fall of snow. You observe that the smaller and slighter of the two was more quick than her companion, and was evidently the leader—the one who took the initiative—because, in returning, she walked ahead of the other one, leading the way; and, because, out there in the street, it was she, the smaller one, who half turned around in

order to direct the chauffeur of the car in what he was to do.

"You fix the time of the arrival of the three at something less than an hour ago, and the departure of the two 'ladies' at approximately a half-hour ago—because we happen to know when this snow began to fall, and about how long a time it continued.

"And you determine, that upon coming out of Vaughan-ton (I don't see why in the dickens old Sterling Vaughan did not spell it V-a-u-n-t O-n, so that the common people would have understood exactly what he intended when he named the place) the said 'ladies' walked rather hurriedly to the corner, where they found their car awaiting them—and from whence they were duly and appropriately driven away into obscurity. All very well. But——"

Moreau stopped.

"As a matter of fact, sir, I did not suggest more than one of the conditions you have named," Feltner replied calmly.

"Well, I did it for you, then. You read it like that, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir. Quite so."

"And, the whole affair is 'none of our business.' . . . As you would remark, Feltner, 'Yes, sir. Quite so.' Come on. We have just about time enough to catch that express into the city."

Nevertheless, Moreau halted again at the corner from whence, in either direction, the high wall of rough-hewn stone, topped with thousands of jagged points of broken glass, extended full three hundred feet, both ways; for Vaughan-ton was located very nearly an hour's ride from the Grand Central station, and in the State of Connecticut; and was a lordly mansion, indeed, surrounded by spacious grounds, and stately, old-growth

trees, and winding paths and roadways, and, in summer, velvet lawns, shrubbery, beds of choice flowers, and sprinklers, and men at work.

Just at the particular time when Birge Moreau and his man Feltner came upon the tracks in the snow, the place was deserted—or was supposed to be so, save, possibly, for a caretaker or two who came and went otherwise than by the great gate of wrought-iron at the front.

"The chauffeur put the chains on his tires while he waited," Moreau remarked when he paused at the corner. "Then he seated himself on the running-board and smoked a cigarette. There is the stub of it, over there. Get it for me, Feltner. Thanks. It is only half consumed—not quite that, in fact. The young ladies did not lose any time after they got the young man inside of the house—if they took him as far as that. . . .

"Feltner, perhaps we should return, even if it is none of our business; eh? That chap might be stretched out somewhere under the stark trees, with a knife wound or a bullet hole in him."

"You don't think that, sir, or you'd have gone inside at once, when we found the tracks in the snow," Feltner replied solemnly.

"H-m-m-m!" Moreau glanced again toward the wheel-tracks and the footprints near them. "Miss Taller stepped directly into the car when they got here," he said, and started onward. "Miss Shorter stood still for a moment to give more directions to the chauffeur. And the car started—whether it kept on or not is another question—toward the city. Come along, Feltner. I don't want to miss that train."

It was some minutes late when it pulled in at the station, so they had ample time. The hour was past

one in the morning when they arrived at the Grand Central station where Moreau's car was waiting to take them to the studio.

The artist had scented a mystery when he discovered those tracks in the snow in front of the gate at Vaughan-ton; but, he knew something of the record, social and otherwise, of young Donald Vaughan, the multimillionaire's son, whose wild oats were taller than the tallest, and spread over more surface and dug deeper into the soil than irrigated alfalfa; and so, during a week following, he watched the papers for a newer and later escapade (that is a gentle word) of that handsome and much-discussed youth.

But nothing whatever concerning him had appeared in print throughout the week; and that fact, of itself, was amazing—that Don Vaughan should be ignored by the newspapers for seven consecutive days.

Moreau, when he thought about it at all, wondered if, perchance, young Vaughan *had* disappeared; but—well—as Feltner had quite properly remarked, it was none of Birge Moreau's business if he had.

Then—things began to happen.

CHAPTER XXXI

SOME CONTRACT!

Crewe stood behind his bar with his arms outstretched, his strong, yet delicate fingers grasping the inner edge of it in the attitude that was so familiar to his patrons. The hideous blemish on one side of his face, beaded and corded and lined, and shaded in color from a delicate pink, to red, to crimson, and to a suggestion of purple, was turned aside so that only the clear, white, perfect profile of the opposite side of his face could be seen by the man who stood in front of the bar before him.

For Crewe had turned his head to look toward the street door which opened at that particular moment, and a gentleman whose features were well known to every person in the city who was old enough to read the daily papers, entered.

"Beat it, son," Crewe said to the man in front of the bar.

"Gee!" muttered the one thus addressed. "It's old S. V. Now, what the——"

He did not complete the sentence, whatever it might have been. Anyhow, it was addressed only to himself. Not to Crewe. But he might be forgiven for expressing some sort of amazement upon seeing Sterling Vaughan, the great Branton's silent partner, walk calmly in at the door at Crewe's.

Along the wall, at the tables, and toward the rear of the large room, at others, the frequenters of the place

raised their heads, or merely their eyes, saw the man (and recognized him, you may be sure) and dropped them again without comment. They were, one and all, denizens of that nether world which studiously attends strictly to its own affairs.

"Are you Mr. Crewe?" Sterling Vaughan inquired, stopping in front of the bar exactly where the yegg had been standing.

"Just—Crewe," was the slow reply, and the owner of that name did not alter his attitude in the slightest degree. "How can I serve you, Mr. Vaughan?"

"You know me, eh? Of course; of course. Oh, a pony of brandy will do. Will you join me?"

Crewe nodded, served the brandy, and shot some seltzer into a small glass for himself.

"I have called to see you on the advice of a man whose opinions I hold in the highest respect, Crewe," the millionaire said, then, "I refer to Inspec——"

"Names are unnecessary, Mr. Vaughan. You are here. That is enough. What can I do for you?"

The millionaire fingered the stem of his glass, turning it first in one direction and then the other, between his thumb and forefinger. He had not tasted of the contents. Apparently he had forgotten about it.

"I applied to my friend, the gentleman whose name I have not mentioned, for advice, rather than for assistance," he said slowly. "The fact is, I am not sure whether I want a doctor, or a lawyer, or a policeman—or an undertaker, Crewe. Sometimes I find myself at the point of believing that the last one I have named could confer the most happiness—in the end."

"As it happens," Crewe replied without smiling, "I don't answer to the description of any of them. I am just a plain keeper of—let us call it a gin-mill. Some people refer to it as a 'dive.' "

"You are—*Crewe?*"

"Yes."

"Well, I was told to 'See Crewe.' That's why I'm here. I want advice. I want somebody who knows the seamy side of life, the underworld side of it, if you want plain talk, to advise me."

"What about?"

"About my son. You have guessed that much already, or you are not Crewe. I cannot just now think of anything else that would have brought me down here to see you. Nor, I hazard, could you."

"What is the matter with him?"

"He is going to the devil with the swiftness of a flywheel on a high-speed engine. He is making about ten thousand revolutions a second. He has got chain-lightning left at the post. I suppose you know something about him, don't you?"

"I read the daily papers, Mr. Vaughan; and I have ears to hear with."

"Do you know him by sight? Has he ever been here, at your place?"

"I know him by sight; yes."

"You did not reply to the second question, Crewe."

"It isn't necessary that I should—because I would reply in the negative, in either case."

"Oh, I didn't ask the question merely to be inquisitive, Crewe. If Don has never been here, it is merely because the place isn't bad enough, or low enough to suit his fancy; or because he has never heard about it. I asked because I thought it possible—in fact, I rather hoped—that you might have seen him during the past week."

"Why? Has he been particularly interesting as a spectacle within that time?"

"A spectacle!" Sterling Vaughan grunted with an-

noyance. "He is always that! He has not been anything else since he was old enough to spend money and seek for bad company. Just now he has disappeared. Nobody has seen hide nor hair of him for a week past."

Christy, the bartender, came from the back room at that moment, and went behind the bar, so Crewe made no comment to the millionaire's statement.

"Perhaps you would like to sit down," he said. "Do you care for the brandy? Shall I take it to a table with us?"

"No. Thank you. I rarely drink anything—only at dinner, possibly."

Crewe conducted the financier to a table at the rear of the room. He nodded his head ever so slightly toward the occupants of the adjoining tables at either side of it, and they immediately abandoned their places for others that were not so near.

"Now, Mr. Vaughan," he said, when they were seated facing each other, "what sort of advice is it that you want from me?"

"I want to know how to save my son. That's flat; and it comprehends the entire condition. I can operate railroads, control banking establishments, create or depose directorates, and sway, perhaps, as much power as any man in the country, but I am a spineless, helpless, imbecilic nonentity when it comes to governing Don. That is why I applied to—to the gentleman I have referred to, who sent me here. I wanted him to do it for me; and he replied: 'See Crewe.' I had a wild sort of notion that he might plant something on Don, and so, scare him into decency, and when I suggested it, he replied: 'See Crewe.' I had an idea of putting up a job on Don, even to the point of putting him away—in prison, even, if there should be no better method—and he told me to see Crewe. Well, sir, here I am.

I am seeing Crewe. If you can help me in this matter, I'll pay——"

"One moment, Mr. Vaughan."

"No. I want to finish what I was saying. I wasn't going to offer you a price. There are some things in the world that money won't pay for, and this is one of them. This is what I was about to say: I will pay anything; money, blood, flesh, bone, or sinew. I won't offer you a price to help me; but—I'll be grateful, and I will find a way to show my gratitude. You see, Crewe"—he bent nearer across the top of the table—"I love my son. That's what's the trouble; I love him too well. I am just a plain damn fool, where he is concerned."

"Finished, Mr. Vaughan?"

"Yes."

"When did you last see Don, and talk with him?"

"A week ago to-day—about three in the afternoon; a few minutes before that, because, I remember now, there was just time enough for him to get around to the bank with a check I gave him, before it closed."

"Was the check a large one, in amount?"

"Eight thousand. He wanted to buy something—I forget what it was."

"Did he say anything about his plans at that time? Where he was going, or what he intended to do?"

"I don't remember. Hold on! Yes I do. He said something about something or other, I forget what it was, that he had left out at Vaughan-ton—that's my place in Connecticut—and that he might go out there after it. But he wouldn't stay *there*. The place is closed up, tighter than a drum. If he went there at all, which I very much doubt, he'd get away from it again as soon as possible. There is nothing in that locality to attract *him*, Crewe."

The man with the blemished face was silent. After a short pause, Sterling Vaughan went on again:

"Save my son, Crewe—if you can. Or tell me how to do it. Say! Look here! I'd like to speak right out, plain to you, if I may."

"That's the only kind of speech that goes, with me," was the calm retort.

"Well, this, then: I won't deny that I have heard—well, things—about you. I asked my friend who and what you are. He smiled, a bit queerly I thought, at the question, and replied, in effect, that you run a place here that is a resort for thieves and crooks, and all classes of the underworld—if there are classes in it. He said that you are called the biggest crook in the lot, only, he added that he would not personally indorse that statement, and that at least the police department has nothing on you. Am I offending you?"

"Not at all, Mr. Vaughan," was the drawling reply, given with just the faintest tinge of a smile.

"I was afraid that I might. But, I don't care a picayune *what* you are; not if you are the devil himself. If you can save my son, and lead him out of the slough into which he has fallen, and which will mean a disgraceful death for him in the end if he is not held up in time, I will put you on a pedestal so high that an angel from heaven couldn't touch it."

"What do you *know* about Don? You speak as if you knew something."

"I know that he prefers bad company to good. I know that he consorts with the lowest kind of scum. He has boasted to me of having intimates among thieves and pickpockets and confidence-men. I know that blackmailers—women as well as men—have been at me more than once on account of him, and things that he has done, and company that he has been in. I know that he

frequents gambling hells—and that he seems to prefer the low-down, stringy ones, to the fairly decent resorts. I know——"

"Has he ever mentioned any names of any of the people you have mentioned?"

"Never by any human name—any name that a sane man would recognize."

"For instance——"

"Oh, he has boasted of being on familiar terms with a 'Salty Jimmy'; he has referred to a young woman who is, he says, beautiful beyond words—I quote him, mind—and he told me once, not very long ago, that he would give up his home, and me too, if he could make her fall in love with him. And, oh, a lot more like that, Crewe."

"Did he give the young woman a name, that you remember?"

"He called her 'the Witch,' I think. Or the witch of something. Ah! I have it. The Witch of the Temple; or the Temple Witch."

Crewe nodded, but it was a nod that indicated only that he understood what had been said; it did not imply that he knew the person, or the place referred to.

"I will see what I can do, Mr. Vaughan," he said, rising from the table. "Do I understand that you give me a free hand? That, in reclaiming your son, I can go the limit, no matter what it may be if it only succeeds?"

"Yes, sir, you do. You can go the limit, Crewe. And if you need any money——"

"I don't. Not now. And you must excuse me. It is almost time to close up."

"All right. When may I see you again, Crewe?"

"Oh, I don't know. I will send word if I want to see you, Mr. Vaughan."

"But I shall want to see you." The millionaire had risen also, and stood with his fingers clenched upon the back of a chair. "We haven't arrived at anything definite."

"Oh, yes we have. I have said that I would look into the matter. That's definite."

"But——"

"Let it go at that for the present. Come in again, if you feel like it. Just now——"

"Yes. I know. I am going at once. Do you know, Crewe, there is something about you that makes me reminiscent; and yet—I'm quite sure that I have never seen you before."

Crewe rarely smiled. When he did so, his was a golden smile, for many of his teeth seemed to be literally made of gold; and there was bridge-work, and fillings so profuse that not one entirely white tooth remained. But he did smile at that suggestion of Sterling Vaughan's.

"Do I resemble somebody you have met?" he asked. "I hope not—for his sake. My disfigurement is scarcely a beauty-mark, Mr. Vaughan."

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Crewe. I had not even thought of that. One does not see it at all when one talks with you. But—there is a something about you—that is to say, if it were not for that—oh, never mind. I'd like to shake hands with you, Crewe. I feel that you are going to help me, where everybody and everything else has failed."

"Good night, sir," Crewe replied, yet not offering his hand. "You don't need my hand. My word is better; and I will help you—if I can. Good night. I hope that you will find your son at home when you get there."

"At home? At this hour? One in the morning!

Oh, no; there isn't any hope of that, unless he should happen to be out of money. That might bring him, and a week is a good while for eight thousand to last, with him. Good-night."

Crewe stood for a time where Vaughan had left him, his eyes upon the door that had closed behind the millionaire.

"He is a shrewd and sharp old chap," was his thought. "Not one in fifty thousand, in his class, would have spotted the faint resemblance to the artist, even if some inkling of the fact *has* got out. I fear—I see, in fact, that something will have to be done in that respect, and without delay. And it seems to be true that Donald Vaughan did disappear, after all, a week ago to-night. Christy," he called aloud, "strike the bell. Are there any mourners to-night?"

By which question he inquired if there was one or more among those present who was shy of a place to sleep and the price of a breakfast in the morning. Crewe never permitted a hungry man or a drunkard in his place. He fed the one, and had the other sent to the Island until he was thoroughly sobered.

"Christy," he said, when the doors were closed and they were alone, "S. V. wants me to play missionary and save his son. What do you know about that?"

"I know that if anybody can do it, you can; but, all the same—it'll be some contract, Crewe, buh-lieve *me*."

"Correct, Christy. All the same, I am going to do it; or——"

"That settles it, then. I lose. When are you going to begin the saving stunt?"

"Right off the bat, lad. And I'm going to begin—mark me, now—by putting 'one over' on you."

"Huh!" said Christy, and turned toward the cash-register.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE TWO CREWES

"FELTNER, there is an axiom to the effect that a man cannot be in two different places at the same time."

"Yes, sir. Quite so."

"I am about to prove the fallacy of that statement, Feltner," Moreau continued smilingly, holding his head a little to one side, which with him was an expression of close and intense observation.

He did it invariably whenever an expression that he sought to reproduce in a portrait eluded him temporarily. It was evident that he was studying his faithful valet's physiognomy just then, and Feltner was aware of it—although ignorant of its cause.

"You'll do, all right," the artist commented, presently.

"Yes, sir. Quite so. Thank you, sir."

"Nature provided you with a voice so nearly like mine, Feltner, that over the telephone-wires and through closed doors, or from behind a screen, you have been able to deceive all comers."

"Yes, sir. Quite——"

"The voice of Crewe, Feltner, is very much like the voice of Birge Moreau, the artist."

"Yes, sir."

"And yesterday—last night, to be more exact—a certain gentleman whose astuteness is supposed to be confined to mere money-getting, discovered in Crewe

or thought he did, which is the same thing, a faint likeness to 'somebody else.' Of course, Feltner, that somebody else must have been Moreau, the artist."

"Yes, sir. Quite——"

"Because I happen to know that the said gentleman and Moreau, the artist, encounter each other frequently at clubs and other places, although their acquaintance is of the slightest. Now, if one man, a mere money-getter, discovers that resemblance—which all the king's horses and all the king's men, including policemen and crooks and what not, have been unable to discover until now—it convinces us, Feltner, that the time is at hand when something must be done to prove to the world in general, and to that man in particular, how dead easy it is to make mistakes. You get me?"

"Yes, sir."

"So—I am about to create a portrait of that man Crewe, using your somewhat wooden face for a canvas. Do you get me now?"

Feltner nodded. He was interested, and neglected his usual formula.

"Your teeth would be the most difficult feature, but fortunately your mouth is fairly well filled with gold as it is; and I have telephoned for Dr. Pontoon to come to the studio. He will have prepared the necessary false bridgework by the time you must go on duty as Crewe; and this small pair of plumpers—my extra pair, Feltner—will fix the voice, all right. Now, stand there; so! And imagine yourself to be nothing more nor less than a canvas-stretcher on an easel."

A detailed description of the artist's work upon the face and features and the outward appearance of his man Feltner during the following half-hour or so is unnecessary here.

We who read should know that Moreau and Crewe

were one and the same man; that the happy accident of Feltner's voice being so like the artist's, had hitherto enabled the former to impersonate the latter perfectly over the telephone, or through closed doors, whenever it happened that Moreau wished to seem to be locked up with his work at his studio, while he was in reality posing as Crewe at Crewe's place below Washington Square.

We know, too, that a few of the officers at headquarters, some civilians, and some few of the underworld contingent had "got wise" to the doubling of the two characters—*or thought that they had done so.* Moreau's aim now was to convince them that they had thought wrong. In a word, he meant to puzzle them more than ever—as we shall soon see.

In stature and general build Moreau and Feltner were about the same, and their voices were really marvelously alike; so the artist began his work with two distinct advantages. What remained to overcome he accomplished through his great talent as an artist. When he finished the task—which he enjoyed since it called upon his unusual abilities to the utmost—you would have said without hesitation, had you been there to see, that Crewe and Moreau stood together in the same room, facing each other.

Crewe, with his pompadour shock of iron-gray hair, his shaggy, iron-gray brows; his sadly blemished face, so repulsive on one side, so perfect on the other; his wide expanse of shirt-front with the headlight diamond gleaming at the center of it; and his pose—*for Feltner had been the artist's model before becoming his valet, and was a perfect imitator. . . .* In fact, in all save the "mouthful of gold," he was a perfect reproduction of the gin-mill-keeper of questionable repute—and

that one defect was remedied by Dr. Pontoon, the artist's dentist, before evening.

Then followed the necessary instructions, although Feltner required but few. It has been said that no person can know a man as intimately as his valet—and Feltner had served the artist a long time in that capacity; and he knew the assumed character of Crewe almost as well as he did the real character, Moreau.

* * *

That same night, at ten o'clock, Crewe stood behind his bar near the lower end of it, in his usual attitude when he was not otherwise engaged—that is, with his arms outstretched in either direction, his fingers grasping the inner edge of the mahogany.

Just beyond the partition at the rear of the long room, Feltner, like another Crewe, stood upon a chair at a peephole, watching and listening. He was taking his second and final lesson in the part he was to fill from time to time whenever it should be found advisable.

The "real Crewe"—and Moreau had played the character so long and so well that the distinction is a good one—from his position at the end of the bar, administered that lesson without in the least appearing to do so.

One by one, on one pretext or another, he called the several characters whom he particularly desired Feltner to know by sight and name, to the bar; or he spoke loudly to them across the width of the room so that an answer was obligatory—and, as it happened, it proved to be an opportune evening for just that procedure, because the very persons whom he most desired to "introduce" to Feltner in that manner were present. . . . Later he walked swiftly down the room and disappeared beyond the door.

"Go outside and try it, Feltner," he ordered; and the valet, who had left the chair upon seeing him approach, replied as undisturbed as if he had been asked to poach two eggs: "Yes, sir. Quite so"; and passed into the barroom.

The gold was in his mouth, the small plumpers in his cheeks. In every respect he was *Crewe;* none other. And to Feltner's credit be it said that he was not in the least disturbed by doubts in any form.

Christy, at the head of the bar near the window, raised his eyes as the supposed Crewe assumed the customary attitude; then, as there was nothing doing at the moment, he drew nearer.

"You haven't forgotten what you said to me last night, have you, Crewe?" he asked, a half grin showing in his features.

"No, Christy," was the reply.

"You was going to put 'one over' on me, you know."

"Uh-huh!" the pseudo Crewe replied. Then: "I am doing it now, Christy."

"I'm from Missouri, you know. Show me."

An expressive shrug of the shoulders, exactly like Crewe's, was the reply, and Christy went back to his place at the head of the bar.

Behind the partition, when Feltner sought his employer again, twenty minutes later, having in the meantime given other evidences of his excellence in the part he played, the artist said, with something like enthusiasm in his voice:

"Fine! You'll do. Go back now and play the part till closing-time; and don't forget about old S. V., as Sterling Vaughan is called down here. He did not say that he would come again to-night, but I think he will."

"I won't forget," Feltner replied, with quite the air of the real Crewe.

"You fooled Christy, all right, and if you can do that—enough said. But be wary with him. I want to keep him in the dark until to-morrow night. I promised to put one over on Christy. He needs it."

CHAPTER XXXIII

EXACTLY TWO O'CLOCK

"FELTNER," the artist said to his valet the following morning, "I want Crewe to be seen about town this afternoon. I want you to walk in and out again at several of the leading hotels. You may make your own selections. If anybody speaks to you, nod, and pass on. At any rate, be as short as possible. Don't forget that Crewe's taciturnity is proverbial, and that he plays no favorites."

"Very good, sir."

"I will make you up, now. You should be able to do it yourself, soon."

"I think, sir, that I could do it now. I have been experimenting," Feltner replied.

"Good! I'll look on, and help if necessary." . . . By which it was discovered that very little assistance was required. Only from time to time as the change was made, Moreau added a touch or made a suggestion, and Feltner was always quick to profit by either.

"I see very great possibilities in the future of this arrangement," the artist remarked when, having dressed, and being in every respect the exquisite portrait artist, he was about to take his departure. "You can be Crewe in the open whenever I need you. You can be Moreau, the artist, over the telephone or behind closed doors whenever that becomes necessary. Last night you successfully deceived Christy—who is sharper than a steel trap. Bantam, Cracker, Detective Sam Bunting, and a

dozen others failed to see through you. Sterling Vaughan, who has already demonstrated that he is more than ordinarily shrewd and quick of eye, swallowed you whole. I congratulate you, Feltner."

"Thank you, sir. I think that I rather like it, too."

"Good! That is more than half of the battle. Now, attention!"

"Yes, sir."

"I want you to leave here about one, or near that time."

"Very well, sir."

"At precisely two o'clock you are to walk slowly past the Homo Sum clubhouse. You know where it is —corner of——"

"Yes, sir."

"Turn from the avenue down the side street. There is a bay window in the building half-way down the length of it. Pause there directly in front of it. Do not look toward it. Take a letter from one of your pockets, and appear to refer to it. Stand so that your full face may be seen distinctly from the window; then turn slightly to show the blemish as distinctly, on one side of it; then turn about and expose a view of the perfect side; then return the envelope to your pocket and walk briskly away."

"I understand perfectly, sir."

"For your enlightenment I will say that I happen to know that the great Branton, and the almost as great Sterling Vaughan, are to lunch together at the table in that bay window to-day, and I have been invited to join them. Branton has advised Vaughan to consult me in regard to his son Donald, and I shall give Vaughan the same advice he has received from others— I shall tell him to see Crewe."

"Very good, sir."

"You will give them both a jolt, Feltner. So-long!"

The Homo Sum Club—referred to among the disrespectful as the "Plutocrats"—is the most rigidly exclusive club in New York. It was said that Birge Moreau, the artist, was the only member of it who was not several times a millionaire.

He entered it shortly after one o'clock, and found that the great financier, Branton, had already arrived.

"How are you, Birge?" Branton greeted him. "Vaughan isn't here yet." He spoke with his customary abruptness. "I suppose you are wondering why I wanted you to lunch with us to-day—eh?"

"No. I think I have guessed. Ah, here is Mr. Vaughan now! We have never formally met each other, Branton."

"No? I didn't know that," Branton said, sharply. "Supposed, of course, you knew each other. Here, Vaughan; shake hands with Birge Moreau. I am surprised that you have not known each other before this. Come over to my table in the window. I have already ordered. Lunch will be served at once. . . . Birge," the great financier continued as soon as they were seated, "Vaughan is in trouble. He is the father of a son who cannot be controlled. But I guess you know as much about Don Vaughan as the rest of the world. Now, fire away, you two. I've got some memoranda here to look through."

Moreau's seat at the table afforded him a view of the big clock in one corner of the room, but he glanced at his watch, compared them, and saw that they agreed to a minute. Then he listened.

It was the same story with variations that Sterling Vaughan had told to Crewe, although with a more intimate touch; and the artist listened gravely to it, occasionally glancing toward the clock. Also, he made an

occasional comment, offered two or three tentative suggestions, and expressed the proper degree of interest, until the hands of the clock in the corner pointed at five minutes before two. Then, with rather startling abruptness, he said:

"Mr. Vaughan, the best advice I could give you on this subject is: Go see a man called Crewe. See Crewe."

The capitalist smiled with amusement. He bent across the table toward Moreau. He shot a covert glance at Branton, who was still engrossed in his memoranda. Then, in a low tone, but with perfect distinctness, he said:

"I have already seen Crewe—twice—Mr. Moreau. Just now I am more than half convinced that I have seen him three times; that I am 'seeing Crewe' now, in fact."

The artist lifted his head abruptly. His eyes snapped. He spoke coldly:

"I don't think I understand you," he said.

"I'll explain—even at the risk of offending you, if you will accept my apologies in case I do offend."

"One does not relish being confounded with a saloon-keeper, Mr. Vaughan."

"No—unless, perchance, one pursues an avocation that invites it, Mr. Moreau. This is my explanation: Your vocation is that of an artist. By avocation—Branton is my informant—you are something of a detective, or is criminologist a better word?"

The artist shrugged his shoulders, and made no reply.

"I am an extremely close observer, Mr. Moreau," the capitalist continued imperturbably, with his shrewd eyes boring into the artist's. "I have seen you and observed you often; once, at least, when you were unaware of my scrutiny. I was interested in you primarily at the

time Branton lost that eighty-one-thousand-five-hundred dollars at your country place, the Fells.

"The time that I saw you when you did not observe me was less than a week ago at the museum. You were so absorbed in contemplation of Rodin's 'Thinker,' so lost in your study of it, that you did not see me. It was a capital opportunity to observe you, Mr. Moreau."

"Well?" laconically, abruptly.

"I make it a practice to look into a man's soul, through his eyes, Mr. Moreau. I observe his postures, his pose, his motions, his manner of using his hands, of stepping out when he starts to walk. I look at the way he holds his shoulders, see how he turns his head, watch how certain observations and remarks affect him. The mere shape of his features, and the outward and visible signs that are apparent to all persons, do not interest me, or, I should say, have very little interest for me. . . . For instance, I employ a great many detectives in my various businesses and varied interests, and one of the best of them has told me that it is not impossible to manufacture and perfectly imitate a very serious facial disfigurement, or blemish."

"Pray go on, Mr. Vaughan. You interest me," Moreau said, this time with a genial and ready smile; and he glanced at the clock, noting that it indicated two minutes to two. The banker continued:

"You have advised me to see Crewe. I have told you that I have seen Crewe twice, and possibly a third time. I saw him for the first time the night before last—and I was remarkably impressed. Not alone by his strong personality, but also by the conviction of my own familiarity with some of the characteristics he disclosed in my presence. I went so far as to speak to him about it. After I left him I thought about it—and I recalled my study of you before that statue of

Rodin's. . . . Last night I went to see Crewe again, and—I must admit—the impression of previous knowledge was less strong. But now, to-day, here at this table, facing you, in conversation with you, it returns with tenfold power.

"And so, Mr. Moreau, at the risk of committing an almost unpardonable offense, I must ask you: Do you, perhaps, find it advantageous, in the pursuit of your chosen avocation, to masquerade as Crewe? In a word, *are you Crewe—and is Crewe a certain Mr. Birge Moreau without the facial blemish?*"

The capitalist leaned backward in his chair, smiling, apparently well pleased with his own astuteness—which, mentally, the artist had to admit.

Moreau glanced at the clock. The hands pointed exactly at two.

He turned his eyes toward the bay window within which they were seated, and at that instant the tall figure of a man appeared upon the sidewalk without, where he had come to a halt, facing it, and where he appeared to be searching through his pockets for something.

Moreau half started to his feet, then sank again upon the chair. Then he smiled broadly, still with his eyes directed toward the window.

"Fortune favors me, Mr. Vaughan," he said, still smiling. "I don't know how I should have succeeded in convincing you otherwise. Out there on the sidewalk, directly before this window, as it happens, is the very man you refer to—unless I am greatly mistaken."

Sterling Vaughan wheeled in his chair. He stared through the window at the man outside in open-mouthed amazement. And he kept on staring; and while he stared, the man outside raised his head thoughtfully, so that a full front view of his face was afforded them.

Then he turned his head and looked down the street, exposing the hideous blemish on one side of his face. Next, he turned completely around to gaze in the opposite direction, and so, exposed only its perfect side; and then he jammed the envelope that he held in one hand into the side pocket of his coat and strode rapidly away.

"Well, I'll be damned!" the voice of Branton grunted from behind the other two men.

Attracted by the eagerness of his two companions in seeking to observe something from the window, he had risen from his place, and had also been a witness to the small comedy so aptly played by Feltner.

Vaughan made no comment for a moment. He seemed, indeed, too greatly nonplused to do so. But he turned slowly to the artist.

"Mr. Moreau," he said, "will you accept my apologies? I am not such a smart Alec as I thought I was. But—er—I was *so* certain that I—er——"

"What's the matter with you, Vaughan?" the great Branton demanded sharply.

"I have made a jackass of myself; that's all, Branton."

"Humph! It isn't the first time. And cheer up; maybe it won't be the last," Branton commented grimly. "You're not alone in it, either. Birge, I could have sworn, on information and belief, that you were Crewe, and Crewe was you. Why, confound it, one of the men at police headquarters told me so himself."

"And I am wondering, gentlemen, whether I have risen or fallen in your esteem," the artist remarked, calmly smiling at them as they resumed their chairs. "May I offer you one of my cigars, Mr. Vaughan? Branton's are much too strong for an ordinary man to smoke."

CHAPTER XXXIV

WHO IS THE WOMAN?

The great Branton left his two companions at the club and went his way soon after the incident at the bay window.

"Will you tell me," Sterling Vaughan asked, when they were alone together, "why you advise me to see Crewe about Don?"

"It is possible," Moreau replied evasively, "that if, in the beginning, you had told me that you had already seen him, I might not have thought it necessary to do so. Crewe is a character. He will assist you, or he won't; and it isn't necessary to apply to him more than once."

"Do you know him, Mr. Moreau?"

"Oh, yes—in a way."

"Perhaps—er—if you would go there to his place with me to see him—eh—what do you say to that?"

Moreau had purposely led the conversation to that point. The suggestion was precisely what he most desired. He nodded his head in willing assent.

If Birge Moreau, the artist, by now quite popularly supposed by many to be identical with Crewe, should calmly walk into Crewe's resort at a time when Crewe himself stood behind his bar, the incident would establish at once and for all time the utter absurdity of such a claim.

But, more than that: Whisperings of the truth as we know it—that Crewe was Moreau and that Moreau

was Crewe—had been passed from mouth to ear in the underworld; and none knew better than Moreau himself that if once such a notion became a settled conviction among the so-called "guns," or even if they seriously suspected that the charge might be true, the career of Crewe would be ended.

It might be all very well that certain men at headquarters should think it, or even know it to be true; even, that men in private life should be aware of it, and that the newspapers should print it; nevertheless, it would never do to permit the dwellers in the underworld to take it seriously, and a call, down there, as Vaughan suggested, would forever put a stop to the growth of any such idea.

"I will go with you," he said presently, "but it will have to be quite late. Shall I meet you here, say—at midnight?"

"Good. Thank you, Moreau. We will go down in a taxi; and one of us can call up in the meantime and tell him that we are coming."

"Oh, no; I should not advise that. We will just meet here at midnight and go. And now, Mr. Vaughan, if I am to add my own feeble efforts to Crewe's, suppose you reply to a few questions that I would like to ask about your son Don. To begin: when did you last see him?"

"One week ago the night before last. He said then that he was going to Vaughan-ton, my place in Connecticut."

"Did he go there?"

"Whether he did or not, he isn't there now. Crewe told me that much last night."

"Oh, he did, eh? Doesn't that prove that he is taking an interest in the matter—if he could give you

that much information? And so soon?" The artist smiled whimsically.

"Of course. He went out there, or sent somebody, after that first talk with him, night before last. I shouldn't wonder if he went that very night. I have a caretaker there who admits one at an iron door in the side wall of the grounds; and one has to telephone one's pedigree first before he will do that. I can't imagine how Crewe could know about that."

"Possibly he had heard it from one of his acquaintances. The underworld keeps pretty close tabs on places like Vaughan-ton that are temporarily closed. I think, in fact, that I have been told as much myself. Also, that the gate at the front is kept padlocked. Have you heard anything from Don, or about him?"

"I don't know."

"Eh? How is that?"

"There was a note in a soiled envelope left with the butler at my door when he opened it this morning. He said that a woman left it, but he could not tell whether she was young or old, or black or white."

"Veiled, eh?"

"Yes. She had evidently been waiting for the butler to appear. She gave him the envelope as soon as he did so, and went away without speaking a word."

"What was the note? What did it say?"

"It said just nine words. 'Dear dad: I am all right. Don't worry. Don.' But I am not sure that he wrote it. It looks like his handwriting, and it does not; so, there you are."

"Have you got it with you, Mr. Vaughan?"

"Yes." He searched in one of his pockets and passed it over to the artist; and the latter, although he glanced at it with apparent carelessness, nevertheless observed it closely.

He folded it and held it in his hand for a moment after that, as if considering the idea of retaining possession of it; but then he passed it back to its owner, with the remark:

"I think you had better keep it and show it to Crewe to-night. Now, Mr. Vaughan, who is the woman?"

"Why, I have told you that the butler——"

"I am not speaking of the woman who delivered the note, but of *the* woman."

"I—I don't think that I quite understand you, Mr. Moreau."

"Mr. Vaughan, young men of the type of your son Donald, with plenty of money and no restraint, worship at three shrines: booze, vice, and chance. Drink, immorality, and gambling, in other words; and the open sesame at the doors of each of them, is a woman. Don, as I understand the situation, is reasonably familiar with the password to all three. So I repeat: who is the woman?"

"I haven't the least idea in the world, Moreau."

"No? Perhaps you know, without knowing that you do know. I have found that that is quite a common condition of the lay mind. Hasn't Don talked about women to you? Has he mentioned one oftener than another?"

"He has talked about one—yes. He has intimated that he was more than half in love with her—only I did not take it seriously. He called her a witch, or the Witch, or something like that. But I haven't the least idea what she may look like, or where she may live, if she lives at all. In fact, as I have said, I did not take him seriously."

"Your acquaintances have not been slow to repeat gossip to you about Don, have they? Or to tell you

about his escapades whenever there was the slightest chance that you had not already been told?"

"No, indeed."

"Well, even I have heard about that wild ride of his down the Ocean Parkway, with an unknown woman beside him, two weeks or more ago. When his car was smashed, she disappeared; and Don refused to tell who she was. Do you know who she was? Did he tell you?"

"Only that she was the one he calls the Witch. You see, Moreau, I don't believe in her; I don't believe that she exists."

"What do you believe about it, then?"

"Why, it is my idea that it is a composite name given by him indiscriminately to any woman, or to all the women, or girls, or ladies, or near-ladies, as it happens."

Moreau glanced at his watch as if suddenly reminded of an appointment, and left his chair.

"I don't believe that you possess any real information that would be of assistance to me—or to Crewe," he said. "But I do believe one thing, and that is, that you suspect something—fear some particular thing, in fact—and that you have not yet brought yourself to the point of telling me. Now, if you want me to be of any assistance to you, you must tell me. What is it, Mr. Vaughan?"

The capitalist hesitated only an instant. Then:

"Really, Moreau, I don't know what I *do* suspect. God knows that I have given Don enough money—"

"Much more than enough," Moreau interpolated.

"Yes; more than enough to satisfy all of his demands. And yet, what I do give to him fades away like a plate of hot cakes before a tableful of hungry men. And that fact fills me with dread lest he is mixed up with something that is not right—with something crooked. I

don't know what to think, Moreau. I dread this: that some man or woman is holding a threat over him; that he is in the power of one or both of such creatures; that he is afraid to do anything, or to leave anything undone, without their sanction."

"In short, and to be brutally plain, you believe that he has done something that would mean prison for him if it were known, and that somebody is holding it over him to—"

"Yes. Don't say it. But that is God's truth. That is what I fear."

"Isn't it what you *know?* Isn't there something of the sort that you *know*—even if the act, whatever it was, only affected you, his father?"

"Yes—that is it, Moreau."

"And you fear that you have not been made the only victim?"

"Yes."

Moreau returned to his studio when he parted with the capitalist.

He knew that Feltner, in carrying out the orders he had received, would be "doing" the hotels about then in the character of Crewe; and so, when he called up Christy, he led the latter to believe that it was Feltner who was talking.

The artist was also quite certain that one or more of the frequenters of the place below the Square—a dip, or a con man, or a swell yegg, wandering about town in search of prey—would encounter him somewhere, and might, that night, or later in the afternoon, mention the fact to Christy; and Moreau was not quite ready yet to let Christy into the secret of the two Crewes. So, in the character of Feltner, who frequently had occasion to call up his master, he asked Christy:

"Hello, Christy! Is Crewe there?"

"Nope. Ain't showed up yet, Felt," Christy replied. "Hold on, though. Wait! Hold the wire. Here he is now."

A moment later Feltner had taken Christy's place at the telephone; and Moreau said to him:

"I want you to go out again in about an hour. Stay out until after you have had your dinner. 'Do' the rest of the swell hotels—only don't stay more than a few moments in any one of them—until dinner time; then dine at one of them. I want Crewe to get himself talked about to-day—by the hotel detectives, by the men-about-town, and by the few swell crooks who will see him and wonder what he is up to now. And this: the last thing before you start out, tell Christy to pass the word along—and to have Bantam and Cracker and Bobcat do the same—that you want every one of the bunch who is not busy to-night to show up between midnight and one o'clock; to tell them that there may be 'something doing,' and there may not, but that you want them on hand in case there is."

Moreau hung up the receiver, and waited. Presently he took it down again, called for police headquarters, and asked for the inspector who was entirely in his confidence; the same one, by the way, who had, in the past, advised the great Branton, and, later, Sterling Vaughan, to see Crewe. Their conversation was short, but it was to the point; and, after it, the plans of Birge Moreau for that night were complete.

CHAPTER XXXV

PUTTING ONE OVER ON THE BUNCH

"CREWE'S"—that is how it was always called; it was never deemed necessary to add to that one word anything that was descriptive as to character or locality—began to fill up as the hour of midnight drew nearer.

Not that there was unusual patronage, but that more "regulars" were there, and that the "aristocracy" of crookdom was more than ordinarily in evidence.

Christy had succeeded in "passing the word" along amazingly well, and Cracker and others had been fortunate in conveying the intelligence that "Crewe wants you to show up between twelve and one to-night. If there's anything doin', he'll touch the button; if there ain't, he won't."

But that was sufficient.

There had been rumors throughout the underworld of late that Crewe was somehow mixed up with the cops; there had been whispers about a swell guy named Moreau, an artist; there had been side glances and winks and shrugs interchanged between the "wise ones," and an uneasy feeling had gone abroad among them that, after all, even Crewe might not be all that they had supposed him to be. Not one among them doubted Crewe, really; but your predatory worker is always suspicious; he doubts his best friend, his closest pal—and sometimes he doubts even himself, which is, nine out of ten times, the one time when he gets "pinched."

Over in one corner two men sat at a table together

who were rarely seen in each other's company anywhere, although it was generally accepted that they were pals. And they were the two most expert yeggs in town. Uptown dips who were swell enough and shrewd enough to ply the best hotels were scattered about the room. Three con men, the slickest of their kind, known from coast to coast among the fraternity (and by the bulls, as well), occupied a table together.

It was such a gathering as could not have been called together in one place by any other man than Crewe—but they knew that when he summoned them they would be safe from molestation. They knew that whenever he sent out word that he wanted to see them, he meant it, and that he had a reason for it. There had been, here and there, one who was "wanted," who had shied at the summons, and did not materialize; but they were the prosuspicious ones, who feared that the summons might be a plant; that it might be Crewe's last play, and that he meant to "shoot them all into the soup" that night, before he gave it out publicly that he and that artist-chap "who was one of them phoney guys that played detective on the side" were one and the same.

Crewe (Feltner, of course) was behind the bar with Christy, and both were kept busy. Three or four among the patrons at the tables had stopped at the bar long enough as they entered, to exchange a word or two with him, but he had seemed to be unusually taciturn, had replied to them curtly, but characteristically withal, and they had passed on, content to await developments.

They knew that it would be something; but just what the "show-down" was really to be, not one of those present even suspected; above all, not one who was there had the faintest idea that Crewe, whom they saw and spoke to behind the bar, was not *Crewe*.

The stage was set. The scenery was arranged. The characters were in their places.

The master mind of Birge Moreau, famed portrait-painter, society's darling when he chose to be so recognized, friend and sometimes confidant of the great generals of finance and the captains of industries—and, on the side, the keenest, shrewdest crime-investigator of the day, and at the same time the best and most sincere friend to all classes of the underworld—the keen, clear intelligence of "the man of mystery," as his best-known friends often laughingly dubbed him—had arranged it all.

Then, at twelve-thirty by the clock that hung above the center of the back bar, the door opened and Sterling Vaughan stepped into Crewe's.

Behind him, tall, straight, perfectly attired, lithe with the grace of a panther, handsome as manly men are handsome, Birge Moreau crossed the threshold.

He was, apparently, just concluding some humorous remark that he had been making to his companion, for he was laughing softly; and he came inside with exactly the air that would have been his upon stepping for a moment into the café at the Waldorf, or upon entering one of his clubs.

In a word, he was perfectly at ease; he glanced neither to the right nor to the left of him, nor at anything in particular, but walked beside Sterling Vaughan, straight to that section of the long bar behind which "Crewe" was standing—with widely outstretched arms and fingers gripping the inner edge of the mahogany.

A hush fell upon the room.

It was a pronounced hush, too; for, while not a man there turned in his seat to see who had entered, while not one of them *appeared* to look, every one present *did* look, furtively, to see who the last arrival might prove

to be. And their conduct would have been exactly the same as it was had the newcomer been the veriest tramp off the street, or the captain of the precinct.

There was scarcely a man present who had not heard the rumors concerning Crewe and the artist. Nearly all of them had pooh-poohed it; some had merely shrugged their wide shoulders and awaited further developments; others had been startled by the possibilities of such a condition. *All* of them, however, felt the importance, the crucial importance, of the moment.

Moreau, seemingly, did not see a face, and yet his glance swept the room—as it would have done any other room he might have entered.

"How-da-doo, Crewe?" he said perfunctorily, and did not offer his hand. Then: "What will you have, Mr. Vaughan? And you, too, Crewe?"

"I induced Mr. Moreau to come down here with me to-night, Crewe," Sterling Vaughan said after they had been served. "You see, my friend Branton advised me to consult with Moreau, and—well—here we are. And, by the way, here is a note I received at my home this morning that purports to come from Don. Moreau thought that I had better show it to you."

"Crewe" nodded, accepted the soiled envelope with its contents, and transferred it to one of his pockets without so much as a glance at it.

"Is there anything new, Crewe?" the capitalist inquired.

"Mr. Vaughan," the supposed Crewe replied slowly, "when there is something 'new' you will be advised of it. Of course, this is a public place, and you have as much right to come here as anybody else. But— Do you get me?"

Moreau laughed aloud.

"That is Crewe's method of telling you that your

room is better than your company, Vaughan," he said. "Sorry, Crewe," he drawled, "that you don't run a place farther up-town, where we could drop in oftener. You are *so* cordial."

He spoke in a low tone, but that unusual hush was still upon the room, and the words he uttered fell upon more than one pair of listening ears that were nearest to him.

"I would feel much better, Crewe, if you would let me supply you with money," Vaughan said, almost in a whisper and bending forward over the bar. But "Crewe" had turned his eyes away even while Vaughan was speaking. He was looking toward the front of the room where the door had opened again to admit more late comers.

Again there fell a decided hush upon the entire place. The frequenters of it stirred as if uneasily. One could hear the faint scraping of many pairs of feet as they were moved a trifle—as one will gather one's muscles and nerves and faculties in preparation of a possible necessity for quick action. . . . For another unusual thing had occurred at Crewe's—and is explained by recollection of the telephone talk between Moreau and headquarters, after the scene at the Homo Sum Club.

The opening of the door that last time had admitted four men, every one of them officers—and one of them in full uniform, with a gold shield pinned to the breast of his coat and with gold trimmings on his cap and uniform. He was the inspector of the district—and it was an unusual thing for him to enter Crewe's at all. If he had business there he usually sent one of his men to transact it for him.

The three men who followed him into the place were in citizens' clothes, but there was not a "gun" present who did not instantly recognize every one of them—and that, too, even though the last one was a comparatively new-

comer down at headquarters—detective Painter by name.

The others were Captain Muchmore, detailed at headquarters at the bureau, and Lieutenant Sam Bunting, who filled the vacancy made by Holderness' suspension from duty.

The inspector walked straight across the room to the bar, where "Crewe" and Sterling Vaughan and Birge Moreau were grouped. The three detectives walked slowly down one side of the room, nodding or speaking a recognition to many of the men who were seated at the tables. They returned to the bar along the opposite side.

It was evident to everybody there that they had been sent to the place to look for some certain person—and it was equally manifest when they made their way back to the bar that the "certain person" was not among the guests at Crewe's that night; and a sigh of relief audible in its uniformity, whispered its way through the length of the room.

The three detectives—Muchmore, Bunting, and Painter—knew Birge Moreau personally.

Each of them—Muchmore and Bunting particularly—had seen him frequently, had had personal interviews with him; and on one occasion the captain and lieutenant had lunched with him at one of his clubs. The inspector, alone of that party, did not know the artist by sight.

But all of them knew Crewe, and thought they knew him well.

The three—Muchmore, Bunting, and Painter—had barely glanced toward the bar before they made the tour of the room together; they had noted merely that Crewe was there, as they supposed, in his usual place, standing in his customary attitude. They had paid no

attention to the two men in front of the bar more than to observe that they were not the men they were seeking, and a casual glance had assured them of that much. Thus a surprise awaited them when they did approach the bar to rejoin the inspector, and when the artist turned slowly to face them, smiling his greeting.

Muchmore, who was in advance of the other two, stopped in his tracks, and his features, although they were well trained in his profession, certainly expressed an interrogation-mark, and one with an exclamation-point before and after it. Bunting grinned. Painter was confessedly nonplused.

"How-da-doo, Captain Muchmore?" Moreau remarked in the most natural tone in the world. "Hello, Bunting! How are you, Painter? You see, I remember all of you quite well."

Muchmore was boring the artist with his eyes. He did not offer to shake hands, nor did Bunting—and Painter was not on sufficiently familiar terms to do so.

"I did not recognize you as we went down the room, Mr. Moreau," Muchmore said. "Your back was turned toward us; and—well, it is something of a surprise to see you down here."

Then he turned his eyes upon Crewe and the piercing quality of them might have feazed almost any other man than the imperturbable Feltner.

He nodded curtly. "How are you, Crewe?" he said. Then, to the inspector: "Updyke, *alias* the 'Gimlet,' isn't here. I told the skipper that he wouldn't be here when he sent us out—and Crewe won't admit it even if he has been here. Come on. Let's get out."

So the four officers trailed one another out of Crewe's as they had entered. But three of them went away thoughtfully.

They had seen Birge Moreau, the artist, in front of

the bar, and Crewe, the mystery, behind it at the same time.

* * *

But—the effect of it all upon that faithful adherent, Christy!

It might be written in large italics, in great big caps, in letters of fire, and even then give but a faint idea of its stupendous quality.

When Birge Moreau walked into that room beside Sterling Vaughan, Christy had stared—for he was rendered literally speechless.

He turned his gaze slowly toward the other end of the bar where he knew, or thought he knew, that Crewe was standing; but Crewe was so given to the performance of seemingly impossible feats that Christy was almost afraid to look lest he should not be there.

But—he was there!

Christy peered again at the artist, by that time directly before Crewe, at the front of the bar; and he ground his teeth together in the utterly paralyzing quality of the puzzle that confronted him.

Crewe was here, to be sure. So was Moreau. One was behind the bar; the other stood in front of it. Several feet of space and a mahogany bar separated the two. Then—how could they be one and the same man?

Christy, who knew himself to be the only person save the ubiquitous Feltner, who was entirely "on the inside" in the confidence of his employer, was not only puzzled to the point of imbecility—he felt, in a measure, outraged also. In his silent thought he kept saying over and over to himself: "Now, whadda you know about that? Now, whadda you know about that?"

But he said nothing, looked nothing, acted nothing, which was not entirely normal, so far as the others who were present on that occasion were concerned—and

Christy was attracting very little attention at just about that time; all of the interest of the evening was centered at that part of the bar where Crewe stood behind it.

Sterling Vaughan and the artist took their leave very soon after the officers went away; and then, one by one, rarely in pairs, the men at the tables made some sort of a silent signal toward "Crewe," received a nod of the head in return, and glided from the room.

Christy watched the clock.

Closing-up time couldn't come quickly enough for him that night; but he struck the bell at last, and those who had remained left their places, and one by one disappeared.

When the last of these had crossed the threshold Christy could not close and lock the outer door quick enough to suit him. Then he wheeled in his tracks, fastened his indignant eyes upon "Crewe," who was openly grinning at him, and who turned then and started toward the door into the smaller of the two rear rooms, where often important conferences were held.

"Say!" Christy called after him.

The supposed Crewe half turned his head. He called back over his shoulder:

"I'll wait in the back room, Christy, while you count up."

Then he disappeared, and for a moment Christy stood in his tracks, staring after him.

"I'm sure gettin' bughouse," he muttered under his breath, forgetting that he could talk like an educated man when it was necessary; and he kept on muttering to himself in an undertone while he wrestled with the cash-register.

The task was completed at last, and he hurried into

the back room—and came to a breathless stop the instant he had passed inside.

Crewe was not there.

It was Feltner who was seated in Crewe's accustomed place at the small, round table, and who grinned at him across the top of it.

"Well—I'll be—" Christy began, and stopped. Feltner, who could relax upon occasion in the presence of others than his employer, grinned genially upon him.

"I'm going to stay down here to-night, Christy," he said. "There would be a cop at every corner, waiting to interview Crewe, if I should go outside; and there'd be a crook on every block with the same idea in mind—eh?"

"What the—" Christy began again, and stopped as before. Words were inadequate.

"Didn't the boss say that he would put one over on you, Christy?" Feltner asked.

"He sure did—and he sure has; and he handed it to a few others, too. Say, Feltner, honest to God now, however did you do it? And do it well enough to fool *me?*"

"Mr. Moreau did it, Christy. That is, he did the most of it, and instructed me how to do the rest. And he figured it out that *if you could be deceived, even for an hour, there wouldn't be much trouble about fooling the rest of the bunch.*"

"Say, how long a time have you been doing this thing, Feltner?"

"We began it last night."

"Huh! I thought—— No, I didn't, either. What's the use of crawling? I'm it. . . . I'll pay. . . . I lose. . . . But, holy smoke, ain't it great?"

"It is, Christy."

"So *that* is why he wanted the bunch to show up down

here to-night! That is why those bulls were ordered by the inspector over at headquarters to snoop around in here to-night, tryin' to lamp Updyke, the Gimlet, when they knew to a dead certainty that he almost never comes here, and, therefore, wouldn't be at all likely to be here to-night. But—the skipper sent them, and they *had* to make the play. Say, Feltner, ain't it rich?"

"It is, Christy."

"Things were sure gettin' mixed. The double play wouldn't have lasted much longer. I thought that the finish was in sight, honest. Why, more 'n a dozen of the regular bunch have thrown the quiz into me during the last week about the suspicion that got out that Crewe wasn't on the level, after all; and the whole shootin'-match was here to-night, too. I'd like to know just what they're saying to themselves now."

"And to each other—eh?"

"Nope! They ain't saying much to one another, Feltner. Nobody likes to admit that he's been a damn fool; a crook especially; and that's about how they're feeling at the present time."

"You see, Christy," Feltner remarked after a short pause, "I don't suppose that I will be down here very much of the time or very often. My work at the other end is too important. But when I am here I will need your help right along."

"Uh-huh! There are a lot of the guys that blow in here that you don't know at all."

"Put it the other way around, Christy. There are few of them whom I do know—more than merely to have heard their names. But I'll soon get wise with your help."

Christy nodded.

"There is one thing, though," he said. "You'll have

to put me wise the first throw out of the box when it is *you;* only, well, I guess I will know *now.*"

"Oh, it will be the boss himself most of the time hereafter unless something especial comes up," Feltner replied. "Now, to refer to what we were just saying. Who is this Updyke, the Gimlet, as you call him? I haven't even heard the name before."

Christy bent nearer across the table.

"I don't know much about him myself, Feltner," he said. "Nobody does. The boss does not. He's a mystery in some ways—and the trouble has been that we haven't been able to decide just what those ways are."

"Tell me what you do know about him, then."

"Well, you take this first: It's *my* opinion that I'm giving you; not Crewe's—or anybody else's. The boss and I haven't had much to say about him; and *I* have sized him up only from what I have seen of him—and that isn't much. Get me?"

"Yes."

"He blew into New York about a year ago—from Denver. He brought credentials with him that put him up to Crewe as being the slickest, quietest, most expert yegg in the West—and he looks about as much like a real yegg as the Duchess of Benkakiak looks like a washerwoman. But he had his underworld credentials, all right, all right, from some of the best. See?"

Feltner nodded.

"He said that lately he'd been operating a gambling joint in Curtiss Street out there, but that the town had got too hot for him."

"What does he look like?"

"He looks like a sissy if you want it straight. Don't forget that I'm givin' you my own personal opinion."

"I know."

"He's about the size of an eighteen-year-old girl.

He's got big, dreamy, sloe-black eyes that can be as snappy as a firecracker on occasion; there is a regular devil in them when he's roused—as he proved in here one night when he first showed up. His hair is as black as a kettle of tar, and he wears a little black Charlie Chaplin mustache that gets onto your nerves after a while, because he's forever monkeying with it—when his hands ain't otherwise occupied; and his voice is as soft as the purring of a cat."

"Why do you call him a sissy?"

"I don't. I said that he *looked* like one. But take it from me, Feltner, there ain't any sissy about him when it gets down to cases. He's a devil! But he ain't Crewe's kind, and he don't come here any more."

"Why ain't he Crewe's kind?"

"Crewe don't stand for any woman business. You know that. And say, Feltner, you just bear one thing in mind, will you, while we're talking?"

"What is that?"

"You work for Moreau, the artist; I work for Crewe, the ginmill-keeper, and the crooks' best friend, and so far as you and I are concerned they are two different individuals. They are both the same man when that man is asleep, but they're as different as milk and vinegar when he's awake."

"I know," Feltner admitted. "Go on about Updyke, the Gimlet."

"He came here as a yegg. He threw out a big bluff about what he was going to do—but he didn't do a thing. Then Crewe got it from Red Donovan that Updyke was fitting up a place up-town for a complete gambling layout; *and*—it was to be a place where women could go as well as men. I guess, maybe, you know as well as I do what that would mean in the final show-

down. It might start off all right with everything on the level, but—"

Christy's pause was eloquent. Feltner's nod was equally so.

"Crewe sent for him—see? Updyke didn't come. Crewe sent me to see him then—and he showed up the next night. . . . Crewe says to him: 'Nothin' doin' with that layout of yours, Updyke, if it's goin' to be a 'ladies' fair,' as well.'

"'What the devil is it your affair, Crewe?' says the Gimlet as uppy as his name implies. 'I've got protection, and I've paid for it,' says he, 'so what are *you* going to do about it?'

"'I'm going to tell you that you're not wanted at Crewe's any more,' says Crewe, reaching for a siphon. . . . And that's all, Feltner. But you can take it from me, Crewe's got it in for Updyke, the Gimlet; and you and I both know that while he has never betrayed a crook in his life, that is on the level with him, the 'guns' that are crooked both ways don't last long. No guy that runs a joint where women go, and are misled, or gamble, or drink too much booze, or get sporty, can be friendly with Crewe. . . . And there's another nigger in this woodpile, Feltner—and that is solely my own opinion, too. I haven't mentioned it before even to Crewe."

"What is it, Christy? Tell it to me."

"I've got a hunch, old man, that Mr. Updyke, the Gimlet, is a woman himself. But it isn't anything more than a hunch at that. I wouldn't swear to it, or even give it out as an expert opinion—because—I haven't seen a thing to make me feel sure of it."

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE TEMPLE OF VICE

It was shortly after two o'clock the following night when Crewe—the real Crewe this time—got down from a taxicab at the corner nearest to his destination, paid the driver, and glanced at his watch as the cab was driven away.

He stood still, where he was, after the taxi had gone, and soon a second cab came rapidly around the corner from the opposite direction.

"Feltner is on time," he murmured. Then he strode rapidly away, paying no heed to that other conveyance; indeed, not so much as devoting a second glance to it.

Near the middle of the block, in front of a four-story house of unusual width, where every window was dark so that not a ray of light escaped from the interior, he paused for the briefest instant, and then ran lightly up the brown-stone steps to the door, where he turned the knob and entered—the vestibule, only. He closed the outer door behind him.

Then he pressed an electric button several times, with peculiar and studied spaces between certain pressures, and a wicket was moved from the inside as soon as he had finished.

One gleaming eye looked out upon him, for the hole through the door was a small one, and was intended to disclose, from the outside, nothing more than that much of the face of the "outlook."

Crewe made certain gestures with his hands. He did

not speak. But the person inside of the door seemed satisfied, for it opened without a sound, and the man with the blemished face entered.

Outside, in the vestibule, Crewe had kept that blemish averted, so that it was not visible to the outlook, but once within the lighted hallway he turned his head so that it could be seen—so that the man there could not well avoid seeing it. . . . And the man uttered a gasp of astonishment and dismay.

"Crewe!" he exclaimed under his breath.

"Yes, Freckles," Crewe replied curtly. "I knew that you were working here, since you got 'out.' And I suspected that you had received orders not to admit me, even if I had the signs. Is that right?"

"Sure it is, Crewe. And I'll be thrown down for this, too."

Crewe did not reply to that. He turned his back upon the man and moved away.

"Here! Wait a minute, Crewe!" the man called Freckles exclaimed in a hoarse whisper, darting after him and grasping him by the arm. "You can't go inside, man."

Crewe turned and looked grimly down upon the broad, squat, long-armed figure of the ex-convict; and the latter grumbled:

"Well, of course I didn't mean that—exactly the way it sounded. But, it's a cinch, Crewe, just the same, that you hadn't ought-ta. See? The main guy—Updyke, I mean—has got it in for you all right, if you show up here. Say, now, on the——"

"Take your hand off my arm, Freckles," Crewe interrupted him, and Freckles backed two paces away at that command. Like others of his kind, he knew that Crewe could not be fooled with. "Now, get back to your place," Crewe went on, in the same low tone, which was

none the less full of emphasis. "I am going inside, Freckles; and up-stairs; and all over the Temple, as it is called, before I go out."

"Crewe, f'r the love of mike, don't try it. You'll never go out again—not even if you *are* Crewe—if you try that. I know what I'm sayin'. I know what you'll be up against," the man protested. "Honest, Updyke'll get you if he finds out that you're here. He's ready for you. I know it. He has suspected that you'd show up, sometime. And, say, Crewe, he's a devil—a double-distilled, dyed-in-the-wool devil."

Crewe smiled grimly, showing his gold-filled mouth.

"I mean it—every word of it, Crewe, so help me!" Freckles declared. "Say! He's got a bunch here that you don't know, and that doesn't know you, either. And they're bad medicine, too. Honest—"

"That will be about all for the present, Freckles," Crewe interrupted. "Updyke isn't the only man who has wanted to 'get' me, and failed. What's doing down here, on this floor, behind those doors?"

"Oh, there's a lay-out, and a buffet, in the back parlor; but it ain't runnin to-night. The front parlor, and the room between, are just—well, rooms."

"What is on the second floor?"

"Oh, that's all one big room, from front to rear. It's the big lay-out. Updyke's got everything you might want, there. Faro, roulette, poker, haz——"

"I know the list. You needn't go over it. How many players are up there, now?"

"Oh, quite a bunch."

"Any women?"

"Uh-huh; about as many as men, I reckon."

"What is on the third and fourth floors, Freckles?"

"Private rooms, mostly."

"What kind of private rooms?"

"Poker—and, so forth. Most any kind you happen to want. Updyke's room, where he sleeps, is on the fourth. And say! The door to it is a steel one, like this, here. You'll have a cinch, I don't think, gettin' into that room, Crewe. There ain't any guy in the house that's ever been into it—except his sister—and Don."

"His sister, eh? Yes, I have heard that he has a sister. I have also heard that she is very beautiful. Is she?"

"She's a corker, Crewe, and no mistake. And there ain't any doubt about her bein' his sister, either. They're as alike as two peas—barrin' the fact that she's a woman, and he ain't. They're twins, I reckon."

"Who is Don—that you referred to? One of the employees, I suppose."

"Say, don't you know who Don is, Crewe?"

"Suppose you tell me. Then I will know."

"Don Vaughan. He's the come-on in this game, Crewe. And, easy? Oh-my-oh-my! That girl can wind him around her little finger, and then unwind him again, and he never puts up a murmur."

"They call her the Witch, don't they?"

"They called her that, out in Denver. I used to know both of them, out there, you know."

"So, the girl is the Witch, and this place is the Temple of Vice, eh? 'The witch of the temple.' Not bad, that. What is the girl's name?"

"I don't reckon that she's got any other one, Crewe. At least, that is the only one I have ever heard, and I have been here since two weeks after they opened. It's better than second-story work. I was gettin' too heavy for that—and, besides, there's lots of peelings, here."

"I suppose so; and some graft, eh? And now and then a good-sized bank-roll that is not fed to the tiger; eh? Is Updyke in the gambling-room, now?"

"No, Crewe; he is right behind you," another voice interrupted, and Crewe wheeled around with the quickness of a flash.

"He has got you covered, too, friend Crewe," the voice went on, mockingly. "You are looking into a gun that goes off on a hair trigger, mister, and your presence makes me nervous, too. You needn't bother to put up your hands, but if you attempt to move one of them, it's yours for the long journey."

The Gimlet, as Updyke was called, though just why does not appear as yet, had approached, silently, two-thirds of the distance down the wide stairway, and stopped there.

Crewe had not heard him, and if Freckles had done so, he kept his countenance so perfectly that Crewe had not suspected.

Updyke was too far up the stairway to admit of Crewe's leaping upon him and disarming him. The gambler was right when he announced that he had the "drop." Crewe knew that—and he thought he knew the character of the man well enough to believe that he would shoot if he should decide that it was the logical thing to do under the circumstances.

Nevertheless, although commanded not to move, and threatened with death if he did so, Crewe started slowly forward toward the stairs, talking in a mild tone of voice as he did so.

"Shoot, Updyke, if you think you dare to," he said. "Of course you can kill me—if you think it wise. And, maybe you'd escape—the legal penalty. But you would not escape my friends. You would stay alive about twenty-four hours."

Crewe had reached the bottom step. He rested one hand lightly upon the post of the balustrade. He stood quite still, gazing, calm and unmoved, into the black

eyes of the young man who held the weapon so steadily, and pointed directly at him. And Updyke did not reply; nor did he retreat—nor did he shoot, as he had threatened to do.

"Well? What are you going to do, Updyke? Shoot? Or, put away the gun? You will have to decide, right away, because *I* am going up these stairs."

"Wait a minute, Crewe. I might shoot, you know, and I haven't decided not to. Did you come here tonight as a friend?"

"No. I am not your friend, Updyke. But, neither am I your enemy—unless you choose to make one of me."

"You seemed to be mightily interested in my career, just now, in your talk with Freckles."

"I am interested in the careers of all men. As for Freckles——"

"Freckles is fired. He knew that when he let you in."

Crewe shrugged. "He didn't let me in until I gave him the signal, and he did not see my face until after I was inside. Still——"

"Who told you about the signals?" Updyke broke in sharply.

"Oh, I called up the Secretary of State at Washington over the long-distance telephone, and he cabled to King Menelik of Abyssinia, and got it for me, Gimlet. I have often wondered why you got that name; now, I know. You ask so many fool questions."

"I don't wonder that the 'guns' are afraid of you, Crewe," Updyke said, not without a trace of grudging admiration in his voice. "It's a great pity that you've got that mark on your face. You'd be a perfect devil among the women, without it."

"Are you feeling a little bit afraid yourself—or are you trying to rile me up?"

"Neither."

"Well, I'm going up-stairs, now."

He started slowly forward, with one hand on the balustrade, with his eyes looking directly into Updyke's.

For an instant more the gambler held the weapon in position, and Crewe knew that he was considering whether to touch the trigger, and take his chances, or to wait.

The gambler decided to wait. He lowered the weapon and returned it to his pocket. Then he stepped aside, and, with a mocking bow, and a smile that showed his white and even teeth, he said:

"Go ahead, Crewe. Take the door nearest to the head of the stairs. I'll join you later on. You will find plenty to entertain you up there."

"I suppose you intend to remain here to put up some sort of a job on me; eh?" Crewe inquired, as he started to pass on.

"Just that, Crewe. There isn't any reason to deny it. You can go outside, now, if you wish, as you came; *but*, if you remain, and see and know what goes on here, you will have to decide to be my friend, *or you won't ever go out again*. And—I'm not alone in this house. Take your choice."

Crewe did not reply.

He continued on his way up the stairs.

Even Crewe was amazed at what he saw when he entered the big salon of the "Temple of Vice," although he had known that it existed; that there was such a resort for a "certain" class of people, male and female, who worshiped at the ungodly shrine of chance.

As Crewe, he had known of it in the way that we have heard Christy describe the circumstance to Feltner. As Moreau, he had "heard" about it, as other men about town "hear" of such places and conditions.

The artist had once or twice thought of getting himself "taken" there, to view the place, but merely in order that he might be posted about it, if the occasion should arise when he would need that knowledge. He had not thought of going there as Crewe, until the remarks made by Sterling Vaughan had made him certain that it was the reputed sister of Updyke, the Gimlet, who had entrapped the capitalist's son. Crewe was never a meddler. Birge Moreau was anything rather than that; but neither in one character nor the other had he anticipated—just what he found.

Every partition had been removed from the floor of the building save that one which surrounded the hall and stairway. The various doors had been sealed, and covered by tapestries or paintings, and only the new and wider entrance which had admitted him, gave access to the huge room which extended all along both the front and rear of the building, and throughout its length.

When he entered, roulette-wheels were spinning—three of them—and men and women were gathered around the layouts, and, at one of them, were standing two deep behind the occupied chairs; and each of the other wheels held its quota of patronage.

A big, double-end faro-table occupied the star space at the middle of the length of the room, and there again many players were standing behind the occupied chairs, and reaching over heads and shoulders in their eagerness to place their bets. Two poker-tables were in operation, one with five players, the other with six. Chairs, couches, davenports, arranged along the sides of the room, and two S-chairs at convenient locations, were more or less filled by persons who had tired of playing, or who did not care to play just then, or who had played and lost—or played and won, and had preserved sense enough to stop.

A staff of negro servants of both sexes fluttered about among the "guests," dispensing drinks, cigars, cigarettes, salads, cakes, bonbons, all things of the sort that might be called for, and all bestowed freely and generously, at the host's "expense."

No palace of a king was ever more sumptuously or gorgeously furnished. No expense had been spared in the selection of the decorations, and no taste had been outraged, save possibly in the choice displayed in a few pieces of statuary, and in the subjects of many of the paintings. But it was not the decorations and furnishings of that big room; nor the games that were being played; nor the number of players—three score or more, altogether; nor the flitting waiters, that amazed Crewe, where he paused for an instant near the door.

It was the plainly apparent general character of the patrons, or of many of them, and the undoubted condition of some of them—and the attitudes of several—which must have been generally accepted attitudes, since nobody gave heed to them, or appeared to be shocked by them, or to object.

Crewe stood with his face averted so that the hideous blemish on one side of it did not show plainly.

Here and there a man or a woman, not playing, glanced at him as he came inside; but not curiously, or with any show of interest; merely because the opening and closing of the door had attracted their attention.

His first thought, after one survey of the room, was thankfulness that he had not visited that gambling hell as Birge Moreau—and he doubted now, as he looked again, if he could have done so. Doubted if he would have been given the "signals," or, if he would not have been refused admittance at the street door, had he gone there provided with them.

A gambling house is not a good place, at its best:

but the worst of such places are never disorderly—within the literal meaning of that word.

Disorder, riotousness, unseemly conduct—any conduct at all that is not consistent with perfect self-control—is out of place wherever games of chance are played. Too much to drink, intoxication, does obtain at times, but nevertheless it is an unwritten law among the gamblers who operate such resorts that the person who takes too much is asked to go away, or is laid aside where the victim of it can sleep it off.

But within the Temple of Vice there was intoxication without reserve—and it was not confined to the masculine devotees; there were women there—women who called themselves ladies within the environmnt of their private lives—who had forgotten their dignity, their stations in life, their obligations to friends and relatives, to fathers, and brothers, and husbands, who had no means of knowing their present whereabouts, or condition. And—Heaven save the mark!—there were several among them whom Birge Moreau, the artist, recognized; whose names and positions in society were familiar to him; who would have been shocked into sobriety and frightened into a panic if they could have realized that society's pet portrait-painter was present among them. There were many men there, also, who were known to him; but, as Moreau, the society man, the artist—not as Crewe, the saloon-keeper, the friend and confidant of thieves and pickpockets and burglars.

The scene was a travesty. It was a living, moving, breathing cartoon; a tragedy of burlesque; an extravaganza.

But, as Crewe, he also recognized certain other individuals in the room. Still, they were not among the patrons of the place. They were dealers, or watchers, or lookouts, or employees; for it was evident that Up-

dyke had picked his helpers from among the byways of the underworld.

Crewe searched with his eyes, seeking Donald Vaughan.

He discovered him, presently, seated between two other men at the far end of the room; men in whom the practised eyes of Crewe recognized the typical "from-out-of-town" spenders who become the favorite prey of gambling-houses when they visit New York for the first time, and who foolishly imagine that they can escape the nets that are inevitably spread for them.

"So," Crewe thought, silently, and without visible expression, "this is one of the shallows of the depth into which Donald Vaughan has fallen. No wonder his father had need of Crewe! It was money supplied by Don Vaughan that fitted up this place; money furnished by him that backs it; his 'influence' that has first induced the presence of these society-folk, male and female; and doubtless his is the final word as to whom shall be admitted here, and whom may not be, from among that so-called 'upper-crust.' He has become a mere 'capper' for an all-around crook who has been everything from a sneak-thief and 'dip' to a 'yegg,' and who has now developed into a would-be Canfield, without a single one of Canfield's several virtues.

"And no doubt young Vaughan believes himself to be the real proprietor, here; is told and is convinced that the profits will go to him. Bah! He doesn't even guess that he is a 'sucker'; a 'come-on' of the commonest type; a victim who is being bled of every dollar he possesses, or can obtain; of every vestige of self-respect; who will finally be forced into actual theft, through forgery, or by opening the way for Updyke, the Gimlet, to get to the safes and vaults of one of his own father's banking-houses."

Crewe moved nearer to the young man, but stopped again, studying him.

He wished to be reasonably sure of the character of the "game" he was up against before he "butted-into" it. And after a little his thought went on again in definite, though unuttered words; such as

"Yes. That is the game. First, the beauty of the girl who is called the Witch. Then the apparently open business proposition for him to become the backer of the 'Temple of Vice,' with an agreement that he will receive the lion's share of the profits, whereas he will get nothing. Then, again, the alluring qualities of the Witch. *Then*—the bank, and the vaults, and the gold and notes within them; and—prison, or death, or both, for Don."

Young Vaughan and the men at either side of him—they were men still young in years, and, from their enunciation and speech, Crewe judged them to be from some part of the great Northwest—were talking and laughing together with every outward manifestation of long and enduring friendship.

One of the two strangers was seemingly far gone under the influence of the drinks he had swallowed; the other was less drunk; and it appeared that both had been playing heavily, and that while one of them had won a nominal sum, the other had lost a large one. And it seemed that he who had lost insisted upon placing one more stake upon the turn of a single card at the faro table, and that his companion and Don Vaughan were endeavoring to dissuade him.

Then, while Crewe stood within reach of them, and could hear all that was said, the drunken one started to his feet and lurched forward toward the tables.

"Tell you what I'll do, Vaughan," he said, pausing unsteadily and speaking thickly; "if I win this time, I'll

play it out and bust the bank—'r I'll play it out and bust myself, 'f you'll promise that if I do win this once—this first bet down, mind you—that you'll bring in th' girl. . . . Tha's fair, ain't it? You only talked about her to us las' night, ole man, an' that ain't enough—not by a damsite; noshir-r-r! An' she said, didn't she, that she'd deal f'r me if I'd come aroun' again to-night. Well, I'm here, ain't I? An' it's up to the Witch to deal f'r me, ain't it? . . . Well, I've got this wad left now, and there's a lot more where this came from. See? Come on. You send for the girl; tha's a good fellow. An' I'll play the game; an' I'm a good fellow, too. That's what. Say——"

"Look behind you, Cramer," his friend interrupted him. "There she comes, now."

The man called Cramer swung around quickly, and nearly lost his balance in doing so.

The door had opened, and remained so, held there by one extended arm of alabaster white that was bare to the shoulder save for the gems that gleamed upon it. The Witch stood at the threshold, as if she were fully aware of the picture she made in doing so.

An exquisite one, truly, which defied description—which attracted every conscious eye in the room. A dark, bewitching, gipsylike beauty, glowing with jewels; a goddess of loveliness and grace.

Then she moved slowly forward across the room toward the group that awaited her.

CHAPTER XXXVII

A TRAGIC MOMENT

The sight of her seemed partly to restore Cramer to his sober senses. He at once straightened and—Crewe thought, watching him—stiffened with some emotion that was deeper than the mere sight of a woman, however beautiful, would have induced.

Crewe saw him seize his companion by the arm; saw that he uttered two words, in a whisper, into his companion's ear—and read the movement of Cramer's lips as he uttered them.

"It's Bernice!" was what he whispered. And the other man, whose name Crewe had not yet heard, nodded, almost imperceptibly, but as if he thoroughly understood. Strangely, not a trace of "too much liquor" remained upon either of those two men—the supposed "come-ons" from the wild and woolly.

They stood waiting while the Witch of the Temple came slowly down the room toward them, glancing this way and that as she progressed, bestowing a smile upon one, a nod upon another, pausing to give her hand for an instant to a third, and otherwise comporting herself like a queen whose influence and sway could not be doubted.

And she was exquisite in her wondrous loveliness. Not the slightest suggestion of her environment was upon her. She seemed entirely out of place within that gambling hell, and among those people of questionable morals and pursuits who surrounded her on every side.

There was not a trace of boldness or hardness in her face or in her manner. She might have been an angel from heaven, instead of the Hecate that she should have been and doubtless was, to lure the unwary to ruin; to be the instrument to visit sin, dishonor, and death upon the men who sought her because of her beauty, her fascination, her angelic witchery.

Still, Crewe bestowed only the briefest glance upon her, for he had seen that while her progress was directly toward the three men who were grouped together awaiting her, she had barely noticed them as yet; that she was approaching them, in fact, merely because Don Vaughan was one of the three, as if she were obeying a summons that had called her there.

"It's Bernice!" the man called Cramer had whispered to his friend—and had instantly become sober; and his eyes had lost their lack-luster expression, no thickness remained in his voice, no trace of unsteadiness was in that sudden attitude that he had assumed of watchful waiting.

But his hand had sought the pocket of his dinner coat. His lips had tightened over his teeth. His eyes had narrowed. His skin seemed to have drawn more tightly over his features, and it had whitened out as a spot on one's arm will whiten under the pressure of one's thumb. . . . Crewe took another stride forward, closer to Cramer, and within reach of him, as the girl—she seemed to be scarcely more than a girl—drew nearer.

He felt that a tragedy was impending; one that it was his sudden duty to prevent. One, also, that could not, by any power of reasoning, have been anticipated.

There had been a whole volume of meaning in the utterance of those two words, "It's Bernice." And a world of suggestion in the sudden change that had come over Cramer.

Only Cramer's companion seemed conscious of the tragedy of the moment. Don Vaughan saw nothing—save the young woman herself, who steadily, if slowly, drew nearer to them. The remaining occupants of the room turned again to the respective games, or to their gossip or story-telling.

Bernice—if that was really her name—with a nod and a bewitching smile toward the last of those who insisted upon recognition, came forward to within a few paces of the group, which now, with Crewe, made four, and raised her eyes, still with the smile glowing within them.

But the smile disappeared as an electric light is extinguished when the switch is turned. Her eyes, soft, alluring, bewitching in their expression only an instant before, turned hard and cold and cruel and repelling.

Her perfect figure, relaxed into exquisite lines while she crossed the room toward them, straightened, stiffened, became rigid, as one sees sudden rigidity develop beneath the sleek hide of a couchant panther that is about to leap upon its prey.

"You?" she exclaimed, without raising her voice.

"I," Cramer replied with a tone of finality in his voice that was unmistakable. He stood very still and straight and tall before her; and when she did not attempt to speak again, he went on slowly, as if he chose his words with care before he uttered them at all.

"It is I, Bernice," he said. "I have found you. I knew that I *would* find you. It is more than a year since—since I began to seek you. Now, just now, I am here to take you away out of this. And—you—are—going—with me."

"I am not," she replied, and would have said more, but he stopped her quickly.

"Yes," he said; "you are going with me. You can take your choice of two places, Bernice; and you know

what they are. I told you about both of them the last time we talked together."

"You think to frighten me?" she asked in a low, tense tone, and calmly; and, also, she managed to incorporate into those five words such a volume of sneering contempt, dislike, even hatred, that he knew instantly—indeed, every one of the four men who heard her understood—that neither threats nor pleadings could touch her.

Crewe, who watched Cramer, saw a change come into his face; saw a flicker of the muscles of his right forearm where the hand and wrist were thrust into his pocket; and saw the quick act of withdrawal of that hand from the pocket—and saw it in time.

The weapon, an automatic, was not half raised when Crewe seized Cramer's wrist.

Those delicate but marvelously tensile fingers of his, shut down around the muscles and tendons and veins of Cramer's wrist like so many steel springs, and paralyzed it—held it helpless and inert and useless—and did it so quickly, and with so little motion on his own part, that if every eye in that big room had been turned in their direction, it is doubtful if one pair of them would have understood what had happened, or, rather, what might have happened.

But the five persons most concerned in the scene understood, and it affected every one of them differently.

Don Vaughan leaped, with outstretched arms and tense, crooked fingers, straight at the throat of the man who had attempted to kill the girl; the girl herself remained without motion, showing no sign of fear.

Cramer's friend, who seemed to have understood from the beginning what was to happen, and who had probably gone there prepared for it, threw himself bodily upon Crewe, tearing at Crewe's hold upon Cramer's wrist

with one hand, reaching forward with a blow at his face with the other one. But neither effort was effective, for Crewe, too, was prepared, as he always was, in an emergency, and he had read the two strangers thoroughly.

A sharp twist of his own right arm sent Cramer forward, sprawling upon hands and knees, to the floor, throwing him out of the reach of Vaughan at the same time that it tore the weapon loose and dropped it; and an upward thrust of Crewe's left arm warded off the blow that the other man would have dealt him, and permitted the opportunity for another jiu-jitsu hold just above the elbow, which unbalanced the object of it, and threw him staggering backward until he tripped over the falling Cramer.

And Crewe, even as the two men fell away from him, almost together, caught Donald Vaughan with both of his suddenly disengaged hands, whirled him around, and sent him spinning backward, so that he nearly lost his balance and fell.

Crewe saw, too, that Cramer's friend, while falling, reached for a gun, but Crewe tore it from him, at the same time kicking at the other one that had been dropped to the floor and sending it within the reach of Vaughan.

"Pick that up and get it out of sight," he ordered, dropping the remaining one into one of his own pockets and holding it there.

"And now, you two freak-bad-men, stand up and look pleasant. If there is any shooting going on, I'm the guy that's doing it—see? And you'd better turn drunk again mighty sudden, Cramer, and pass this business off as a joke—or you'll wish you had."

He spoke without raising his voice, without excitement.

The whole thing, from start to finish, had not occupied

more time than one would consume in counting one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, and, during all of it the girl had apparently not moved—and because of that fact, doubtless, she seemed to be the most unconcerned one of the actors in this scene.

Throughout the length and breadth of the room, where fully threescore persons were present, not a dozen pairs of eyes had witnessed the disturbance at all, and they had seen only the end of it. A few—half a dozen, perhaps—started to their feet; but even they relaxed upon their chairs again.

The most disturbed one of the group was Don Vaughan.

He still held the gun in his hand that he had picked up from the floor at Crewe's command, but he offered no resistance when the latter snatched it from him and hid it out of sight. Instead, he started forward impetuously toward the girl—and he would have taken her in his arms, totally unmindful of their surroundings, had she not moved quickly backward out of his reach.

Even then he would have pursued her, doubtless, if Crewe had not dropped a viselike grip upon his arm and so held him utterly helpless.

"If you make another break, Vaughan, like the two you have already made, I'll twist your arm out of its socket," he said harshly.

"Who the——" Vaughan began impetuously; but Crewe twisted, as he had promised to do, and Don Vaughan stopped and an expression of wondering pain came into his eyes.

"Now, you two guys beat it out of here!" Crewe ordered, wheeling savagely upon Cramer and his companion.

"No!" the girl said quickly, speaking for the first time since the disturbance began. "They cannot go—yet."

Without turning her head she clapped her hands twice together, three times in quick succession, and the four negroes who acted as waiters and helpers came quickly toward her. But they halted at a respectful distance, as if awaiting a second signal from the girl. Then she spoke again in a low tone, addressing the four men who faced her.

"Follow me, all of you!" she said sharply in a low tone. But it was a decided one, that seemed to admit of no argument and to consider no negative; and she turned her back coolly upon them and started toward the door with the same leisurely grace and with the same smiling, indolent, bewitching air that had charmed the roomful when she drew near to them only a few moments before.

Don Vaughan started after her humbly, with no thought of disobeying.

Cramer and his companion hesitated for the briefest instant, turning their eyes toward Crewe; but he made one quick gesture of command—he had a mind now to see the thing through to the end, and he saw in the present circumstance an opportunity to view other parts of that strange house—and they followed also.

Crewe brought up the rear nonchalantly enough, but with eyes that saw everything; even the quick interchange of meaning glances between the four negroes as they drew back to permit them to pass.

Thus, play at the tables in the gambling-room was resumed, while the odd little procession passed to the doorway and through it, following the beautiful girl, who was known as the Witch of the Temple, to—what?

CHAPTER XXXVIII

CREWE WENT OUTSIDE; AND CREWE CAME IN

Bernice, otherwise the Witch of the Temple, conducted them up the stairs to the floor above, thence through the hallway to a door at the front, where she tapped with the tips of her fingers against one of the panels, evidently giving a preconcerted signal.

There was a wait of one short moment. Then the latch clicked, the door fell ajar, and they passed into a lighted room, large and square, and adorned and decorated with even more magnificence than the big room beneath.

An alcove—or another, smaller room—at the rear was separated from it by a heavy, wine-colored curtain, and the girl crossed straight toward it, where she turned and faced them for an instant.

"Wait," she said briefly; and disappeared beyond it, sweeping it aside and restoring it to its place as if with one gesture.

Cramer and his companion, dark-visaged, both of them, scowling, morose, and savage—and without doubt utterly fearless—turned quickly, and faced Crewe, sticking out their prominent chins after the manner of men of their undoubted type.

"Now," said the one who as yet remained unknown, "my name is Radnor. Who the hell are you?"

"Crewe is my name," was the quiet reply.

"What in blazes did you butt your pretty face into this affair for?"

"Just to make little boys like you two half-grown guys ask fool questions," Crewe replied calmly.

Then his manner changed. He bent slightly forward toward them. The ghost of a smile flickered in his eyes. Some of the gold in his mouth gleamed upon them. His eyes narrowed into an expression which every crook in Gotham knew and feared.

"I'm pretty well known around this camp that we call New York," he said, "and it is not a habit of those who do know me to talk back to me nor to make unpleasant remarks about the beauty of this face of mine."

For a moment more the two men stared at him. It was plain that they were not afraid; they were not that kind. But neither were they utter fools.

Both knew that the man with the blemished face had their guns in his pockets, to say nothing of possibly one or more of his own; and Crewe, perceiving their hesi-

[illegible] was aware of the cause of it.

[illegible] sit down, both of you," he ordered sharply. "And [illegible] different sides of the room, too. That's right. You'll [illegible] trouble if you show a little sense. I'm more of a [illegible] than you are; but when I see an imita- [illegible] attack a woman, and another Rube blow into [illegible] to help, I put them down as a whole lot [illegible] than a skunk, and treat them accordingly. [illegible] Now I laughed, step over near the window. I want [illegible] to you."

[illegible] who had looked on silently, started into [illegible] face—much too handsome for his [illegible] flushed deeply. His big, long- [illegible] were the primal cause of so many of [illegible] and [illegible]. He straightened his [illegible] squared his wide shoulders un- [illegible] with an manner that was as natural

to him as it was to look handsome to women, replied:

"Who the devil are you, anyhow, Crewe? I have heard of you, of course; but what—"

Crewe did not wait for him to complete the latter question. He doubted, even as it was, if there would be time before the girl returned for him to say the few words to Don Vaughan that he meant to say.

He stepped nearer to the young man and gripped him by the arm. Then—nor did young Vaughan venture to resist—he led him across the room toward the window, and paused only when they were sufficiently far removed from the other two.

"What is the game that you are playing, Don Vaughan?" he demanded then in a low tone.

"That, my dear fellow, is none of your infernal business," was the quick but easily insolent retort.

"I am here to make it my business," Crewe said meaningly.

"Oh! Are you, indeed? Say, Crewe— Oh, I have heard about you, and heard you described, too, so I know that you are Crewe—you seem to think that you are the only hair in the comb, don't you? According to your own ideas you're the only towel that's left on the rack; but you're not. Take it from me."

Crewe half smiled at the young man, showing the yellow gold of his teeth.

"Bluff doesn't go with me, Don," he said. "I'm acting under orders in coming here after you. And I have a free hand. So I'm going to warn you first; and then, if you don't heed it, I'll act."

"Aw, you make me tired! You're one of those—"

"That will do, baby mine. Do you know what port you're bound for if you stick to this game?"

"It's none of your business."

"Oh, yes, it is. I'm making it my business. The

road you're tramping on now leads straight to Sing Sing—and maybe worse."

"Does it?" mockingly. "Now, what do you know about that? Say, why don't you give up mixing drinks for con men and yeggs and open a mission-house?"

"Have you thought what might have happened if Cramer had succeeded in killing that girl to-night?" Crewe asked, ignoring the other's remark. "He meant to do it. It was the thing that he came here to do."

Vaughan's eyes darkened. His brows lowered. The question brought him back to present realities with a sudden jar.

"I'd have killed *him!*" he gritted out between his teeth.

"No," said Crewe. "That other man, Radnor, would have killed you before you could have had a chance. They're no hop-scotch boys. And that is what would have happened if I hadn't been there. But suppose Cramer had killed the girl and you had killed him? *You* would have gone to the room with the little door; and to the chair. And that is about your finish, Don, if you don't quit this bunch."

"Aw, go and chase yourself. You give me a pain." He turned a glance of malevolence in the direction of Cramer and gritted out: "I'm not through with him, yet."

"Listen here," said Crewe shortly. "There isn't much more time for us to talk. Your dad put me onto your trail, and he's paying for it; so I'm not an eleemosynary institution. You needn't run away with that idea, Vaughan. You're up against it with this low-down bunch you're training with, now. And they'll get you sooner or later. Sooner if you stick with them; take it from me. It doesn't interest me whether you get what 'll be coming to you at the final show-down, or if

you flag all of it by being good now and listening to your dad. But—I have been running down your back trail, Vaughan. And—I know more than you think I do."

"Maybe you know too much, Crewe; and that wouldn't be healthy for you," was the biting and threatening reply.

"Maybe I do, Don; but my health is reasonably good just now. I don't 'take' things that are catching; not as a rule. Anyhow, I'll throw a jar into you. I'll hand you a tip that ought to make you sit up and take notice."

"Aw, you—"

"I have been out to Vaughan-ton, Don," Crewe interrupted him quietly.

"The devil you have! Say, Crewe, you want to keep your meddling fingers out of *my* business. You're not roosting over your own dunghill now. You are in the Temple of Vice, and it's a place that is harder to get out of than it is to get into—as you and those two over there will find out pretty damned soon."

"Bluff, Don; bluff!" Crewe replied; and reached out and seized him by the arm a second time, holding it in a grip from which there was no escape. "You needn't struggle," he said calmly. "It won't do you any good. I could tie you up in a knot and toss you over my head if I cared to do so. Listen now. I *have* been to Vaughan-ton. I was there when you were, a little more than a week ago, one night when it snowed—when you remained there and your two companions came away. Touches you, does it? Makes you wonder what else I know, does it? Well, I have been there twice since then. And maybe you can guess what for. Now—"

"Damn you, Crewe!"

"Now, there is just one way out for you, Vaughan;

there is just one chance if you will take it. Go home to your father. Cut this all out. Cut out the girl—and her *sister!*—and her—BROTHER! They are——"

With a quickness of motion that Crewe had not credited him with, Don Vaughan raised his right hand and struck straight out from the shoulder; but the blow that would have fallen squarely upon the point of Crewe's chin was arrested half-way; the arm that dealt it was caught and twisted, and received a wrench that threatened to pull it from its socket; then Crewe half turned about, brought the arm he had seized upon, down over his own shoulder, bent forward suddenly, gave a quick jerk, and Vaughan's legs and feet described a crescent through the air, and the young man himself was hurled across the room straight toward the heavy, wine-colored curtains.

At that very instant they were parted, and Updyke, the Gimlet, appeared between them, while directly behind him, forming a half circle, and with leveled automatics in their hands, were the four burly negroes who had responded to the girl's signal in the room beneath.

Directly into that group the hurtling form of Donald Vaughan catapulted, and the weight of it, the strength with which he had been thrown, mowed them down like so many ninepins.

Crewe, who had not anticipated such an ending to the scene, instantly saw the advantage, as working directly in favor of a tentative plan of his when he had directed Feltner to drive to that same house in a second taxicab—Crewe's own, with its trusted driver—and to wait outside for further orders.

Crewe leaped toward the door at the instant that Vaughan's catapulted body mowed down Updyke and his negroes.

Cramer and Radnor attempted to beat him to it,

but Crewe pushed them aside and, pulling the door open, he seized the shank of the key and withdrew it from the lock; then, springing into the outer hall, he closed the door and locked it, all in an instant—and then he ran down the stairs two steps at a time, leaving the key in the door.

There was nothing to impede his progress. Nothing interfered with his quick descent of the two stairways. Not a sound from above had disturbed the players in the big gambling room.

But at the bottom of the stairs, Freckles, the guard, barred his way, gun in hand; and—for an instant only—he put up a great show of bluster.

"It's orders, Crewe," he said. "You stop, or I'll shoot."

Crewe kept on just the same.

"Give me that gun, Freckles," he ordered calmly, and reached out and took it. "Don't you suppose I know that you would not dare to shoot me?" he asked, and stripped it of its venom.

"Hold it now," he said then, returning it. "I'll put you right in a minute; before anybody gets here. Open that door. I'm not going away. And I'm not going to call anybody inside. Close it after me, and be ready to open it again when I give three taps upon it. You know what will happen to you if you don't obey me."

Crewe stepped into the vestibule, and the steel door closed after him.

Outside, at the bottom of the brown-stone steps, another Crewe stood waiting. It was Feltner, of course.

Crewe gave Feltner rapid and exact instructions. He told him what had happened inside, and what was likely to happen—and exactly how he was to act; and he added at the close:

"You'll be safe enough, Feltner. Knowing that Crewe

has been outside and has dared to return, they won't attempt any violence. But—they will keep you there for a time, and that is exactly what I want them to do—because—because they will attempt to do at once the thing that they did not intend to do for a week or two yet. And that is what I want. Play your part, Feltner; and play it good and strong."

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY

THE Crewe who came outside from the Temple of Vice hurried away to the tall studio building in Blank Street and at the break of day Birge Moreau caught an early morning train for that station within the border of the State of Connecticut which was renowned principally because the village that surrounded it contained the summer home of Sterling Vaughan, the capitalist.

It was still too early in the morning for very many people to be abroad in the streets when Moreau arrived. He walked, practically unnoticed, to the high, wrought-iron, padlocked gateway through the higher wall that encompassed the magnificent structure of the boastful, if oddly spelled, name.

There was no snow on the ground to tell tales of his approach; no observer at hand to witness the fact that he possessed a key to the padlock; and so went inside, relocking the gate after him; and—as he somehow seemed to know—no caretaker on the premises to discover his approach and inquire as to his business there at that unseemly hour.

He let himself into the house with a second key—and not by the stately entrance at the front of the building, nor yet by one of the several that were in common use when the house was occupied; but by a narrow door of solid oak that was hidden away in semiobscurity behind an arbor, and which gave entrance upon a nar-

row hall which, in turn, admitted him to the private library of Sterling Vaughan. . . . It provided a convenient method for that gentleman of finance to receive some of his fellow directors and schemers in various enterprises when those persons desired to arrive and depart without ostentation.

Being inside, and having disposed temporarily of his hat and overcoat and gloves, he made a tour of several of the rooms of the mansion, moving from one to another like a shadow, and with no more noise than one, peering into this one or that one and nodding his head or shaking it at what he saw or did not see—who can tell?—and finally came to a stop before a door on the second floor that was closed, and doubtless locked, also.

"As I supposed," he remarked rather enigmatically, but apparently with entire satisfaction so far as he was personally concerned. "One of them is here; the change—if change there was—would have consumed less time otherwise. *One of them is here; but which one?*"

Moreau did not voice these sentiments aloud; did not voice them at all, in fact. He thought them, but with the same consecutive clearness that would have resulted had he put them into words.

Then he bent forward and examined the keyhole of the door, and, with a smile of satisfaction he took a small and delicate instrument from one of his pockets, slipped one end of it noiselessly into the keyhole, gripped it tightly, and turned it slowly and steadily. Releasing his grip upon it, he withdrew it, and gently turned the knob of the door, which he pushed softly ajar until he could see into the interior.

It was a sleeping-room, large, and sumptuous; and it contained a wide, high, and canopied bed; and the bed held an occupant.

"It is unseemly, of course, but it must be done,"

was Moreau's thought as, with a half smile he stepped lightly across the threshold and moved like a spirit, or the shadow of one, over the thick, rich, and soundless rug toward the bedside.

He paused there, near the head of it, withdrawing a trifle behind it, for greater security in case the sleeper should be partly aroused. But after he had waited a moment, and being satisfied that the occupant of the bed would not awaken, he stepped nearer, and looked down upon the unconscious sleeping one.

And it was a woman—a girl, rather—upon whom he looked.

"If I did not *know* differently," was his silent thought, then; and he did not conclude the statement, whatever it might have been that it implied. But, if he had voiced the thoughts that came after that, they would have been something like this:

"How beautiful; and how angelic in her beauty. It is the face of an angel, a seraph—a fairy goddess that is given to good deeds and holy thoughts. It is the countenance of utter innocence, without guile, devoid of sin or of the shadow of a sin. And, oh, what a paradox! What a travesty! What a living, animate, featured lie!

"But, which is the real Witch, and which is the sister of the Witch? And, is there a brother? An Updyke, the Gimlet? Or, do these two change and interchange? Is one of them sometimes the brother, and the other one the sister, and *vice versa?* . . .

"And how could any jury of twelve men, with blood in their veins, and bone and muscle, and sinew in their bodies, be prevailed upon to convict either of these two girls of a crime? Who would be convinced of the depths into which these two personifications of innocence have dived, or who could be made to believe them

yeggs, pick-pockets, gamblers, near-murderers, lures for the unwary, despoilers of honesty and purity?

"Crewe might testify against them—but Crewe cannot—or won't. Moreau could testify against them—but Moreau will not."

Outside of the closed and locked door, a moment later, as he turned to go to the stairway, he murmured:

"It was not necessary that I should have gone into that room, after all, for I am no wiser now than when I entered it. I am just as wise, but no wiser."

He shook his head solemnly as he went on his way, and was still shaking it, when, as he dropped upon a chair in the private library, he heard the distant tinkle of a telephone bell from another part of the great house—and a faint, almost indistinguishable buzzing, in unison with it, in that very room where he was seated.

With a confident smile he straightened in his chair and reached for the desk phone that was practically at his elbow—for, on the occasion of his last preceding visit to Vaughan-ton he had discovered that by turning a switch in the private library, conversations over the wires through the house could be overheard.

But the distant bell, and the near-by buzzing as well, sounded twice again before a response was vouchsafed—he being careful to hold down the hook at his own instrument during such periods. Then:

"Bernice?" a voice said; the same voice he had listened to at the Temple of Vice only a little more than two hours before. And then, the reply. He started when he heard it, for, save that it was nearer, and therefore more distinct, it might have been the same one who had spoken before.

"Yes, Lola," it said. And Moreau knew that the reply came from the girl he had looked upon while she slept.

"Much has happened," the first speaker went on, with evident desire to say no more than was strictly necessary. "The excursion planned for a week or more hence, must start this coming night."

"But Lola—" the voice from up-stairs began, and was interrupted, impetuously, and imperatively.

"Hush," it said. "Don't talk. Let me do the talking. To-night—this coming night, as I have said. It is fixed. We are leaving here within the hour, in the car. We should be with you within two hours. Everything is in order. The matter can be accomplished now, as well as later. Perhaps better. We are agreed as to that. It simply must be done at once, or not at all. Good-by."

"But, wait, Lola. There is—"

The sharp click made by a receiver being returned to its hook, cut off the connection, and Moreau knew that the conversation was ended.

He listened, however, for a time longer—or, rather, he held down his own hook while he watched and listened to know if the girl up-stairs would make any attempt to renew the conversation.

But she did not.

Moreau had had no sleep whatever the preceding night, and knowing that he would have approximately two hours for much-needed rest, he stretched himself upon the leather couch between the windows, and in another moment was sleeping as quietly and soundly as if there were not great events depending upon his awakening at the right moment.

But he did awake at precisely the moment he desired. There have been several celebrated characters who could sleep for an allotted number of minutes, and wake up at a precise moment; and a great many who are not celebrated, and who have never been heard of—of which

Birge Moreau, the artist, was one. He opened his eyes, glanced at his watch, arose, and presently left the private library.

The odor of coffee in preparation assailed his nostrils and made him wish that he might have a cup of it himself, when he passed from the little corridor into the main part of the house. He understood by it that the girl up-stairs was making ready for the anticipated events of the day.

His previous visits to that house had informed him thoroughly of its interior. He had mapped out exactly what he would do in an event like the existing one.

From another point of vantage he listened; and, hearing no sound, was convinced that the expected ones had not arrived—although the dial of his watch told him that they were due, and should be there at any moment.

Certain indications had informed him, on the occasion of those previous visits of his, in what room these people made themselves most at home, and where they held the conferences that were necessary to the perfection of their plans. He sought it, then—but he did not make the mistake of remaining there.

He did a thing that he had intended to do later on, but the necessity for which had been hastened; for the room mentioned was the breakfast-room, with its large, round table, and easily moved chairs, and from which access could be had to an alcove of the general living-room of the mansion. This was by sliding doors, and Moreau moved them apart, half an inch so that he would be enabled to both see and hear what might be done and said in the breakfast-room, later. After that he returned to the private library and waited.

There would be no chug of an approaching car to apprise him of their coming. That would be left some-

where outside of the grounds. But the window of the private library commanded a view of the narrow, cemented path which led from the small iron door through the wall, to the quasi-secret entrance to the house, and Moreau watched it through a slit in the lattice, holding the shade aside with the tips of his fingers to do so.

They came, within a few minutes after he began the watch; and they arrived within the grounds, one by one —for although it was still early in the day, it was necessary that they should avoid attracting attention.

A motor-veil and coat hid the face and figure of the woman who was the first to appear, but Moreau knew by her carriage, and the lightness and grace of her step, that she was the girl he had seen at the Temple of Vice; the twin, doubtless, of the girl up-stairs—and her exact counterpart.

Goggles and caps, and coat-collars turned up around their necks, did the same service for the three men who followed her, one by one; and all that Moreau could determine about them were two facts: One of the three men was unmistakably Freckles. None of them was Don Vaughan.

Two of the three, therefore, he did not recognize. But he knew that he would see them, presently, through the crack between the sliding doors, and he was content to wait.

But Moreau did not recognize them even without their motor-masks, and caps, and coats. Updyke, the Gimlet, was not among them, unless, as the artist half suspected, Updyke really was one of the sisters who masqueraded in the part.

But, also, he had his doubts as to that idea. There had been too much of the genuinely masculine about the Gimlet, in the few interviews that Crewe had had

with him, to uphold that theory without a large mental reservation. It was certain that Donald Vaughan was not there, and it was improbable, according to Moreau's view, that Updyke was one of the three men.

The startling thing about the resulting interview between the five was when the two girls entered the room and stood side by side, facing Moreau where he surreptitiously peered at them from his vantage point of the crack between the sliding doors.

They were so exactly alike—and yet, seen together, side by side, so unlike.

Possibly, however, the unlikeness between them would not have been noticeable to another observer who had not the penetrating gaze, the comprehending eyes, and the analytical alertness for physiognomy that the portrait-artist possessed. But, he could discover hardness, lack of "soul," unmoral tendencies, in one of the two faces, and every evidence of the opposite of those qualities in the other one.

It was Lola—she who had been called Bernice at the gambling-house—who lacked those womanly qualifications; and Bernice, the girl of the untroubled sleep, who possessed them. But it was apparent, too, that down there, Cramer had believed that Lola was Bernice, and that he and his companion had acted accordingly.

"But," Moreau asked himself, "what does Don Vaughan believe? Is he in love with Lola, or with Bernice? Does even he know one from the other? Does Cramer?"

Deep within the soul of the artist there was a gradually forming and momentarily strengthening conviction that Bernice was, at heart, and in intention, as good—as good as her sister Lola was not. Yet Bernice was seemingly conversant with her sister's deeds;

was apparently content to be the surreptitious occupant of a house where she had no right to be; was seemingly complacent in regard to the wicked things that were constantly going on around her; was one of five persons called together at a last conference before (as Moreau believed that he already knew) the vaults of one of Sterling Vaughan's banks should be broken open and rifled of its riches.

Moreau watched and listened at the crack between the doors, and the mystery—an utterly hellish one when he came to understand it—gradually unfolded itself. He was more and more amazed as events developed.

Many things were made clear to him while he listened and watched. Among them, the utter simplicity of genuine goodness, and the complete depravity of its opposite. Among them, also, the temporary safety of Feltner—and what might have happened to himself had he remained inside of the Temple of Vice, instead of escaping from it, and substituting another in his place at the very time when he had done so.

Likewise, what would have been the fates of those two men, Cramer and Radnor, who were imprisoned with Feltner, had he, Moreau, not been there in the house at Vaughan-ton when he was, and listening to the plans of the "Witch of the Temple of Vice," as he did.

After more than an hour the three men took their departure as they came, one by one; and each of them knew exactly what to do afterward, and where they were to come together again when the hour should be at hand.

The two girls remained in the house.

Still, when, an hour after the last of the three men had gone away, Moreau left the big house to return to the city, he did it openly. He walked down the

roadway to the great gate, removed the padlock, passed outside, replaced it, and went on his way, knowing that he would not be seen by eyes that watched from the house behind him; for he knew that Bernice and Lola both slept just then, and that there was not the slightest chance that either of them would return to consciousness for many hours to come.

Moreau knew, also, why Donald Vaughan had not accompanied Lola and the three men to Vaughan-ton; knew where he could put his finger upon that young man at any hour of the day, and the night that would follow it; knew when and where he *would put down that finger*, and had planned exactly what preparations he would make before the time came to do so. . . . He smiled to himself with undoubted satisfaction when he thought of that part of what was destined to happen within the ensuing twenty-four hours.

The one item that still remained shrouded in mystery was concerning the identity of Updyke, the Gimlet.

Reference had been made to him frequently. It had been stated frankly that he would be on hand when the time came. His name had been used quite freely in connection with the plans of the would-be thieves and robbers; but in the third person always, and as if he, like Don Vaughan, had had other things to accomplish in the meantime. But there had been a difference in the developments in that respect; for, while the things that young Vaughan had to do were described in detail, the outside duties of Updyke, the Gimlet, were not told at all.

When Moreau arrived in the city he called a taxicab and had himself driven slowly through that street where the Temple of Vice was located; and the house, by day, was dark and gloomy, and apparently untenanted.

Yet Moreau knew of at least three men who were inside of it, and he understood how unlikely it was that any of the three would ever have escaped from it alive had he not made that early-morning journey to Vaughan-ton.

CHAPTER XI.

THE INSIDE OF A BANK

Crewe stood behind his bar, near the lower end of it, in his customary attitude.

Over the middle of the back bar, beneath the clock, there was a lettered sign which read, in bold, black characters, done by the hand of Christy:

BEAT IT TO-NIGHT
EVERYBODY
WHEN THE CLOCK STRIKES
TWELVE

The regular patrons of the place asked no questions. A few, not so well versed in the ways of Crewe, did so, and were told tersely that both Crewe and Christy had important business elsewhere that night, and that the place never kept open unless one of them at least was there.

When Bantam came in—he had once been a yegg, but was now on the level, although that fact was not generally known in the underworld—Crew signaled him to the bar, and showed the younger man a slip of paper which he held concealed in the hollow of his hand. It bore an address in pencil.

"Be there at one o'clock. Have Cracker with you. You'll find Christy, and you'll find me, too," he said tersely.

"And," he added in a still lower tone, for he liked and trusted Bantam, and preferred not to mystify him

too greatly, "there will be two bulls in the party before it is over—Muchmore and Bunting. But you needn't be afraid of them, lad. They are two out of the ninety per cent. of white cops in this burg."

Bantam nodded understandingly. A little later he passed outside. Cracker, for a wonder, did not appear at Crewe's that night, so it went without saying that Bantam found him.

Just a little before one o'clock that night, six men, walking singly, approached from four different directions a certain banking institution located in the lower part of the city, and not far from the center of the financial district.

When they came close enough to the building they had in view, they went to it swiftly, and each one found that the network gate of steel that guarded the entrance, gave before the pressure of a hand that was pushed against it; and so each one of the six stepped inside and was lost to view—if there had been anybody to view the scene, which there was not.

Beyond the gate, the great door, bolted and barred, and provided with burglar alarms by night, opened readily for them; and when they were all inside, it was again closed and locked and bolted and barred, as it should have been.

The six men assembled immediately in the directors' room, to which they were conducted by the man who had admitted them, and there they found still another man—thus making eight in all, in the party.

The man who admitted the others to the bank was Sterling Vaughan, its founder, and principal owner.

The man who was already inside of the directors' room when they reached it was the night watchman

of the institution, whose name we will call Bonway—because that is not it.

Sterling Vaughan had not been outside of the bank since it closed that afternoon—because Birge Moreau had called upon him there at two o'clock, by telephone appointment, and the two had talked together long and secretly thereafter.

When the night watchman arrived to assume his duties, Vaughan called him into the private office and said to him:

"I shall remain for a time after the others are gone to-night, Bonway. I have some writing and figuring to do. You may let me outside later."

But later, when the bank had been closed and locked and bolted and barred and burglar-alarmed, and otherwise made ready against the uncertainties of the night that was to follow, Mr. Vaughan, acting entirely upon instruction that Birge Moreau had given him in detail, again called the night watchman into the private office.

"I am through with my work," he said. "Yours is just beginning. Do you like the job, Bonway?"

"Yes, sir," was the man's ready answer.

"You keep yourself armed, of course?"

"Yes, sir. This automatic and this 'billy.' But there isn't any chance in a place like this that there will ever be use for them."

"Let me see them."

Bonway passed them over. Mr. Vaughan put the billy down on the table behind him and held the automatic gun in his hand, with the muzzle of it carelessly directed straight at the night watchman.

Then he told the man some surprising things, the substance of which was that he had been informed on the best of authority that the bank was to be robbed that

night; that he, Bonway, was to admit the robbers, and that he, Bonway, had been instructed how to manipulate the electric alarms so that they would not work, and so that they might be restored practically in their original condition later.

Also, that the burglars were to bring with them certain electrical apparatus which would burn their way through the heavy vault doors as easily as heated knives will penetrate cheese; and much more of the same general character.

And he closed the interview—when he had sufficiently reduced Bonway to a full and complete realization of his own position—with this statement:

"I am apprised, Bonway, of what was to happen, and so nothing will be lost. Even the vault will not be injured, and nothing in the bank will be disturbed. Your conduct and your willingness to accept a bribe should be punished. But if you will do exactly as I instruct you in this matter, you shall have another chance. I will even go so far as to keep you on here, believing that the lesson will make you even a better man than you have ever been; and if ever the opportunity offers, Bonway, you may thank Mr. Birge Moreau, the portrait-artist, for I am acting upon his advice."

When the night watchman had utterly broken down, and later recovered, and when the matter was thoroughly adjusted, Mr. Vaughan cautioned him:

"Remember, Bonway, you are to act in all things exactly as you would have done if the plot had not been discovered—and that I also know that my own son is the man who bribed you, and that he will be here with the others who will come here to steal. But I mean to save him—and you are as much worth saving as he is."

Thus the six men, besides Vaughan and Bonway, who were inside the bank shortly after one o'clock that morning were Captain Muchmore and Lieutenant Bunting, of the detective bureau, and Bantam, Cracker, Christy, and—Crewe.

Why that selection was made will be seen.

At ten minutes to two Bonway "fixed" the electric alarms. At five minutes to two he fixed the network gate outside of the front door in the same manner in which it had been arranged for the entrance of those who were already there.

At two precisely Donald Vaughan arrived, and was admitted. He passed into the directors' room, which, oddly enough, was unoccupied. The eight men who had been there were disposed of in other convenient locations about the bank. The night watchman was the only one of them who remained in evidence.

After Donald Vaughan, the others arrived one by one, four in all. A fifth—Freckles—was not with them. He had been posted somewhere outside to watch. And so far as we know, he is still watching, or is beating it for the Far East.

And all of the four, apparently, were men—only when they were assembled in the directors' room, it could be seen plainly enough that one of them was a woman dressed in masculine attire.

Lola Temple, she was; for that was her full name. Opposite her, across the table, and facing her, stood her counterpart, nearly.

But that counterpart wore a mustache that had grown on his face, and was undeniably a man, who spoke and acted and comported himself like a man; and once, when Lola had occasion to address him directly, she called him Joe.

The one great fact was that Bernice Temple *was not present.*

The remaining two of the four were expert electricians, doctors of physics, in fact, who had drifted into the underworld and become crooks—and dangerous ones.

Donald Vaughan, pale, and with burning eyes and compressed lips, stood aside from the others. Already he was deeply regretting the part he was taking in that affair; but he kept his eyes upon the girl who was dressed as a man—and so, apparently, kept up the false courage that had buoyed him to the infamous act of consenting to the robbery of his own father's bank.

They were strangely silent, all. It was as if the impending thing that hung over them was casting its shadow before. The two electricians, only, were occupied—in making ready their contrivances for burning into the vaults.

Then—

"Hands up!" a clear, strong voice called out to them, suddenly; and we need not describe the resulting, but only momentary, confusion. Resistance was utterly useless, and one and all of them had sense enough to see it.

It was Crewe, of the blemished face, who called out the order. It was Crewe, with an automatic in each hand, who faced them when they turned. And both Joe Temple (alias Updyke, the Gimlet) and his sister, the Witch, fell backward a pace, aghast and affrighted at the sight of him.

Beside Crewe, at either side of him, equally well armed, and equally ready to act, were Bantam and Cracker on one side, and Christy, and the night watchman of the bank, at the other. Captain Muchmore and Lieutenant Bunting and Sterling Vaughan were no-

where to be seen. The would-be burglars did not know of their presence there—and never did know about two of them. But they were close at hand, nevertheless, and prepared, in case they were wanted.

Donald Vaughan collapsed upon a chair and buried his face in his hands. The two electricians stood very still, with their hands raised high above their heads. Updyke, the Gimlet, smiled sardonically, and said nothing.

Lola looked from one to another of the group, and then ran to the chair upon which Don Vaughan had fallen. But the instant she touched him he started to his feet and leaped away from her.

"I know you! I know you now!" he cried out in desperation. "I would not believe; but now, I *know*. You are not Bernice! Bernice is good, and she loves me. You are vile, and—Oh, I know! I *know!* I *know!* See! I received a letter this afternoon by messenger. Crewe sent it. Crewe signed it. There he stands, over there. That man Crewe. He told me in the letter that your name is Lola; not Bernice. That there are three of you, instead of two of you. That you are triplets, not twins. Oh, I know—I know, now."

Lola faced him boldly, contemptuously, and did not deny. What need? She knew that he knew.

"Bernice is good!" he went on, half wildly. "I know that she is good. And Crewe knows—he says that he found it in the records of vital statistics—that Bernice is my wife. He says that she is a prisoner, at Vaughanton, and that you keep her there, by threats, just as you and your brother, when he was disguised as a woman, kept me there, with drugs, for nearly a week, after you left me there that night that you drugged me, when I took you there at your solicitation to show you the house. And you have made me believe, ever since I mar-

ried *her*, that I had married *you;* and you refused to be my wife in fact until I consented to this robbery, and saw it through. Oh, I know you now. I know *her* now, too. And I am saved, saved, saved! Thank God."

"I guess, maybe, you'd better thank Crewe, too," Lola said.

Then she turned and faced Crewe.

"Well," she said, "what is the answer?"

* * *

The answer to that question addressed to Crewe, by Lola Temple, may be told quickly.

Her thought, and Updyke's, and that of both of the electricians, was, in effect, that Crewe and his followers were there only to insist upon taking the lion's share of the proceeds of the contemplated robbery; but when, at that juncture, Sterling Vaughan stepped into the room and confronted them all, they saw differently.

Lola started backward, then recovered herself, and stood waiting. Updyke, the Gimlet, only smiled. Then he turned to Crewe.

"So, you are a double-crosser, are you?" he sneered. "The men you know won't stand for that, and you know it."

"Yes, they will, Temple—where *you* are concerned. And, also where you are concerned, I am not a double-crosser. But you are not going to prison—you are going to leave New York, and these United States—you and your sister Lola, together. And you are not coming back here, either of you. If you do—I will see that you both go to prison, and I won't need this case to send you there, either. . . . You thought that you locked Crewe up with two other men, in the secret hide-out for the gambling implements, up at your tem-

ple, didn't you? And you thought that we would stay there until we starved, didn't you? You knew that not a sound could be heard from that place, and that it would never be found unless the house were torn down, piece by piece. That is attempted murder, at least, Gimlet. But that hide-out wasn't built to hold Crewe —nor the man whom this Lola-girl fooled and ruined, to the top of her bent, in Denver; nor his friend who came here with him, to see justice done."

He turned upon Lola.

"*You* are that man's lawful wife; you are Mrs. Cramer; and if he still wants you, I will send him after you, if you want *him*. I heard it all from your own lips, early to-day, at Vaughan-ton. I was there. I am everywhere that I want to be. I learned then how your sister Bernice had been deceived, fooled, misled, played with, by you and your brother. She thought that you were going back home; that you were to start to-day; that Donald had told his father about the marriage, and that you were all going in Mr. Vaughan's private car. I know how you dosed her coffee, when you drank some with her, early this morning. I saw how you and the two electricians and Freckles kept to other topics than the real one, until she had dropped off into unconsciousness from the effects of the drug you had administered. And then I heard all that remained. I overheard all of your plans, every one of them. I got the whole story of your continued deception of Bernice—whom you could deceive only because she believed that you and your brother are as good and upright as she is, herself. Your sister is as good and as pure as you are bad and contemptible. I heard it all. I know it all. And I sent that letter to Donald, hoping that he might believe it—and in the risk that he might show it to you.

"But—that is all. We are here under the protection of the law, and with the approval and consent of those who represent the law. Bonway, the watchman, will open the door for you. Go, now, and keep on going. If you attempt to return to the 'temple' you will be arrested. Get out of the country, and stay out of it, if you know what is good for you. . . . And that advice goes with you two crook-electricians, too. . . . You are getting off easy, all of you. I'm Crewe, but I'm not a double-crosser You are all free to go, if you go now, and keep on going."

* * *

"Moreau," Sterling Vaughan said to the artist at luncheon the following day, where they had met at the urgent request of the capitalist, "that man Crewe is a wonder. He has saved my boy Don. Good Heavens, man, do you know what that means to me? Why, there is not a thing in the world that I wouldn't do for him, if he would let me; but he won't. He won't let me do a single thing."

"Then, why not let it go at that, Vaughan? By the way—Don is married, I hear."

"Yes. And he loves the girl; and she loves him; and she is beautiful, and good, and I am glad—very glad. They are up at Vaughan-ton now."

"And—er—the brother and sister of Don's wife? What of them?"

"They sail this very afternoon for Europe, never to return," the banker replied. "At least that is the understanding and agreement."

On a west-bound passenger train that same evening two men, Cramer and Radnor by name, departed for their homes, sadder, and somewhat wiser; and whether

or not Lola ever again communicated with Cramer does not appear.

And down at Crewe's, on certain nights, Feltner, the ever-faithful, is on duty in Crewe's place, but whether the name is Crewe, or Feltner—who can say?

THE END

They Were Alone . . . .

The magic of the desert night had closed about them. Cairo, friends,—civilization as she knew it—were left far behind. She, an unbeliever, was in the heart of the trackless wastes with a man whose word was more than law.

And yet, he was her slave!

"I shall ask nothing of you until you shall love me," he promised. "You shall draw your curtains, and until you call, you shall go undisturbed."

And she believed him!

Do you want to see luxury beyond your imagination to conjure,—feel the softness of silks finer than the gossamer web of the spider—hear the night voices of the throbbing desert, or sway to the jolting of the clanking caravan?

Egypt, Arabia pass before your eyes. The impatient cursing of the camel men comes to your ears. Your nostrils quiver in the acrid smoke of the little fires of dung that flare in the darkness when the caravan halts. The night has shut off prying eyes. Yashmaks are lowered. White flesh gleams against burnished bands of gold. The children of Allah are at home.

And the promise he had given her?...let Joan Conquest, who knows and loves the East, tell you in

DESERT LOVE

For sale wherever books are sold, or from

The Macaulay Company

PUBLISHERS

15-17 W. 38th St. New York

Another tremendous success by the author of "DESERT LOVE"

THE HAWK OF EGYPT

Joan Conquest's exotic story of the love-madness with which mysterious Egypt drugs the souls of men and women.

Its realism will thrill you

You will see:

Cairo, the native quarter, the bazaars, the flaming desert, the love tryst in the temple of Ammon, Zulannah, the dancing girl—the jewelled siren of the Nile, Damaris, the beautiful English heroine, Kelham, the lion hunter and Hugh Carden Ali, the man who sold his life for

One Hour of Love

Here are two pages selected at random from

THE HAWK OF EGYPT

a love story without asterisks

DAMARIS bowed her head so that the curls danced and glistened in the light, as the torrent of his words, in the Egyptian tongue, swept about her like a flood.

"Hast thou come to me in love, thou dove from the nest? Nay, what knowest thou of love? I ask it not of thee—yet—but the seed I shall plant within thee shall grow in the passing of the days and the nights and the months and the years, until it is as a grove of perfumed flowers which shall change to golden fruit ready to the plucking of my hand."

He pressed her little hands back against her breast so that the light fell full upon her face, and he held her thuswise, watching the colour rise and fade.

"Allah!" he whispered. "Allah! God of all, what have I done to deserve such signs of Thy great goodness? Wilt thou love me?" He laughed gently. "Canst thou look into mine eyes and shake thy golden head which shall be pillowed upon my heart—my wife—the mother of my children? Look at me! Look at me! Ah! thine eyes, which were as the pools of Lebanon at night, are as a sun-kissed sea of love. Thou know'st it not, but love is within thee—for me, thy master."

And was there not truth in what he said? May there not have been love in the heart of the girl?

Not, maybe, the love which stands sweet and sturdy like the stocky hyacinth, to bloom afresh, no matter how often the flowers be struck, or the leaves be bruised,

from the humdrum bulb deep in the soil of quiet content. But the God-given, iridescent love of youth for youth, with its passion so swift, so sweet; a love like the rose-bud which hangs half-closed over the door in the dawn; which is wide-flung to the sun at noon; which scatters its petals at dusk.

The rose!

She has filled your days with the memory of her fragrance; her leaves still scent the night from out the sealed crystal vase which is your heart.

But an' you would attain the priceless boon of peace, see to it that a humdrum bulb be planted in the brown flower-pot which is your home.

And because of this God-given love of youth which was causing her heart to thud and the blood to race through her veins, she did not withdraw her hands when he held and kissed them and pressed his forehead upon them.

"Lotus-flower," he whispered so that she could scarcely hear. "Bud of innocence! ivory tower of womanhood! temple of love! Beloved, beloved, I am at thy feet." And he knelt and kissed the little feet in the heelless little slippers; then, rising, took both her hands and led her to the door; and his eyes were filled with a great sadness, in spite of the joy which sang in his heart as he took her into the shelter of his arms.

"I love thee too well," he said, as he bent and kissed the riotous curls so near his mouth. "Yes, I love thee too well to snatch thee even as a hungry dog snatches his food, though, verily, I be more near to starving than any hungry dog. What dost thou know of love, of life, in the strange countries of the East? For thy life will

"I have owned a hundred women!"

he answered defiantly.

The girl recoiled as from a blow. Was this man who paraded his conquests before her the same one who had feasted so freely on her lips that moonlit night in Grand Canary?

She was his prisoner now. He had stolen her and brought her to his stronghold in the desert. Her father was also a captive. Pansy Langham's life had crashed in ruins about her. What good were her millions now? The mask had been removed. Raoul Le-Breton was the Sultan Casim El Ammeh!—a Mohammedan!

And yet she wanted no man's kisses but his. Love for him consumed her, but race and religion stood between them.

Little did she guess that the Arab had foreseen this minute, that he had trailed her father, Sir George for fifteen years. The Englishman, a captain at the time, had killed his father. Casim El Ammeh had not forgotten. Revenge was his at last!

He had intended having his way with her and then selling her as a slave—a fate more cruel than a white man could conceive. But love—an emotion an Arab scoffs at—had come to thwart him. Was he to forego his oath of an eye for an eye, or open the doors of his harem and seek forgetfulness?

Read

A Son of the Sahara

By Louise Gerard

Who gives you the real thrill of the Great Desert

For Sale wherever books are sold or from

THE MACAULAY COMPANY

PUBLISHERS

15-17 W. 38th Street New York

A beautifully illustrated edition of

Beyond the Rocks

By Elinor Glyn

Now ready at the same price as
"Three Weeks"

A flaming romance as only the author of "THREE WEEKS" could write it; as only Gloria Swanson, with dashing Rodolph Valentino playing the lover, could make it live in all its ardent splendor.
The story of a passionate young heart bound by society's conventions, struggling and risking all for happiness.
—of gay nights of revelry in the Parisian world of fashion.
—of intrigue and coquetry in the gilded resorts of London high society.
Never before have such dramatic love-scenes, such spectacular adventure been placed before the public. The love-drama with all the thrills and luxury of a life-time! The one book and picture you'll never forget!

HS